



21st Century Archmage [Korean Novel]

While on a school field trip in the Czech Republic, Kang Hyuk happens to stumble into a shop called “Archmage.” To his disbelief, the shop is actually owned by an archmage... from another world! Forced to become the Archmage’s disciple, thus begins Kang Hyuk’s journey. (TALL. ASIAN. MC.)

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<http://japtem.com/projects/21st-century-archmage-toc/>

Glossary for 21st Century Archmage (21세기대마법사)

Contains spoilers up to the current translated chapter. Continue at your own discretion.

NAMES

All names will be in last name, first name order, with hyphens

M = male, F = female

Characters

M - 강혁 - Kang Hyuk [1.1]

Our main character. 6' tall.

M - 중현 - Joong Hyun [1.1]

Kang Hyuk's best friend. Chubby and sweet-natured.

F - 서예린 - Seo Ye-rin [1.1]

Kang Hyuk's love interest. A very smart and beautiful girl. 5'5" tall with long, black hair.

M - 황성택 - Hwang Sung-taek [1.1]

A rich brat in Hyuk's class at school. Successor to the Ohsung Group. 5'7" tall.

M - 아이달 (건달프 할방) - Aidal (Bumdalf Gramps)
[1.2]

An 8th Circle archmage from Kallian Continent. Nearing 200 years of age. Hyuk's master.

Has a title of 금안의 사신 아이달, Golden-Eyed Reaper Aidal.

M - 야스마할 - Yasmahal [1.2]

The master of the Golden Magic Tower in Kallian. Around 40 years old. Worked with mages from other empires and kingdoms to bring down Aidal.

F - 마르소 - Marisol [1.3]

Stewardess of Hyuk's plane. A French blonde beauty with long hair.

Places

대한고등학교 - Daehan High School [1.1]

Hyuk's school. Provides a stipend for all your school needs and is notoriously hard to get into.

칼리얀 대륙 - Kallian Continent [1.2]

Races

오크 - Orc

A race that possesses physical prowess double that of robust humans. Often the butt of jokes and insults.

Events

1차 신마대전 - First Divine War [1.2]

A war between mages of darkness, who opened a dimension to the demon world, and humans. Required the intervention of a dragon to end.

마도시대 - Magic Era [1.2]

The peaceful and productive era of magic before the First Divine War. Humans dominated the land.

Groups/Organizations/Magic Towers

대한그룹 - Daehan Group [1.1]

오성그룹 - Ohsung Group [1.1]

황금마탑 - Golden Magic Tower [1.2]

A secretive group headed by Yasmahal. Worked with other mages to bring down Aidal.

주신 아데인 - Great God Adeine [1.2]

MAGIC

Magic Terms

룬 어 - Rune language [1.2]

마나 호흡법 - mana breathing technique [1.2]

Four different mana breathing techniques exist. Knights have their own technique and store mana in the lower danjeon, mages store mana

in the middle danjeon, and summoners store mana in the upper danjeon. The differences in mana storage differentiate the three different classes. Hyuk has his own mana breathing technique, multi-chi channeling, which allows him to accumulate and store mana in all three danjeons.

내공심법 - internal chi meditation [1.2]

What Aidal learned from a 청해 도인, ascetic monk, during his travels in China. He reinterpreted into a mana breathing technique that only Hyuk can use.

단전 - danjeon [1.2]

Korean word for dantian. It can be seen as the body's storage for chi. This is where mana accumulation occurs.

양의심공 - multi-chi channeling [1.2]

A mana breathing technique that incorporates all three danjeons. Hyuk's unique technique.

마나 고갈 현상 - mana exhaustion state [1.3]

A condition that occurs if one uses more mana than they possess. Not very harmful at low circles, but at high circles, it can be fatal.

마나 환원의 법칙 - Law of Mana Restoration [1.3]

Powerful mana will be compelled to return to its original state.

Magic Circles

차원 이동 마법진 - Dimensional Travel magic circle

[1.2]

A magic circle from the Magic Era. Completed by Aidal.

마나 주입 마법진 - Mana Injection magic circle

[1.2]

An original magic circle developed by Aidal, used to inject mana for Hyuk's mana succession.

강제 지식 전이 마법진 - Forced Knowledge Transferral magic circle

[1.3]

Imparts all of the caster's knowledge to the recipient. The activation incantation is 마하임, Magic Inheritance.

Spells

슬립 - Sleep [1.1]

스톤엣지 - Stone Edge [1.3]

Materializes a large boulder.

1서클 - 1st Circle

파이어 볼트 - Fire Bolt [1.2]

2서클 - 2nd Circle

파이어 볼 - Fire Ball [1.2]

3서클 - 3rd Circle

라이트닝 - Lightning

4서클 - 4th Circle

에어 실드 - Air Shield

[1.2]

5서클 - 5th Circle

번 플레어 - Burn Flare

[1.2]

6서클 - 6th Circle

7서클 - 7th Circle

블리자드 - Blizzard

[1.2]

마나 클리어 - Mana Clear

[1.3]

Grants a cleansed body and mana field.

8서클 - 8th Circle

9서클 - 9th Circle

KNIGHTS AND SUMMONERS

Knights (기사들)

오러 블레이드 - Aura Blade

[1.2]

Usable only by knights.

Summoners (정령사)

정령 - spirits

[1.2]

Creatures summoned from a different dimension.

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Archmage: Volume 1 Chapter 1

Citizens of the Cat Empire,

You must be going, “Whaaat? A new project? When you haven’t even released X, X, and X?”

Well, first of all, I would like to make my intent crystal clear. I picked up this series on a whim and do NOT plan on translating all 18 volumes of this series. Honestly, even one volume would be an achievement. It WILL be dropped at some point, and anyone else will be free to translate it. It will be a solo project of mine, with proofreading kindly brought to you by Masadeer. Therefore, this project is being labeled as a “teaser” series.

Don’t read if you’re spoiled by those wuxia translators spewing releases every other minute. I promise you quality, but I am a slow turd.

Also, a warning: this series has a slow start.

Finally, many thanks to the Japtem staff for allowing me to selfishly host this series on the site!

Now, onwards! Put your cat ears on (and wait!).

Your Alpaca Queen / Cat Ear,

Lei

Meeting Gandalf the Archmage

Translated by Lei

Proofread by Masadeer

“The Golden Lane was originally built as lodgings for the guards and gatekeepers of the Prague Castle. As metalworkers and alchemists came to live there during the 16th century with the development of commerce, it was formally named the ‘Golden Lane,’ just as it is now! Now, let’s have everyone go in and freely look around! You have one hour! Be sure to gather here again within the time limit!”

The guide who was leading the students shouted at the distracted kids.

‘Hehehe, where else can I experience such extravagance? A man has to swim with the big fish after all. Uhahahaha!’

Just two months after beating the competition and entering Daehan High School, the school known as Korea’s most prestigious institution, I boarded an airplane for the first time in my life.

Though my father was a well-off fund manager and my mother was a music professor, the two of them were immensely stingy. They never failed to go on trips around the world for a month or two every year, but they were extremely cruel to their precious, precious, one and only son. During my stormy period of adolescence, when I asked them why they treated me like someone they’d picked up off the street, my parents very simply laughed at my resistance and trampled over my rage.

'Males must be raised with a strong hand in order to survive' — such was my father's ridiculous opinion.

My mother backed him up, saying, 'All the expenses you're using right now are the blood and sweat of your father and mother. Do you want to become a thankless child who carelessly wastes that blood and sweat?'

It wasn't a safari wilderness simulation game or anything, yet my parents raised their only child with such severity.

After that, I saw that there was no one in the world who I could trust, and spent every single day studying until my nose would start bleeding.

And then, the school I had chosen, Daehan High School. It was the high school that the president of the Daehan Group, the biggest business in Korea and among the top in the world, was the director. From the moment you entered to your graduation, all the expenses and pocket money you needed for school life were provided by the Daehan Group.

Therefore, it was said to be harder to be accepted into than Seoul University, but I was able to get into such a school.

And as a benefit of that, I was currently able to enjoy a paradise-like 10 days 11 nights school excursion in eastern Europe.

"Hyuk, let's go sightsee. Hehe."

While I was preoccupied with my thoughts, Joong Hyun, a guy who looked as friendly as your next door neighbor, dragged me along with his plump rump behind him.

"Okay. Huhuhu."

No matter how miserly my parents were, this was their one and only son's school excursion. I was generous enough to at least buy them a souvenir or two.

'Alchemists? Did they really live here?'

Upon entering the Golden Lane I saw charming buildings and various worthwhile handicrafts, through the windows. Perhaps it was because the ancestors of this place had been gold metalworkers and alchemists, the myriad kinds of ornaments I saw were more than enough to catch my attention.

"Wow, pretty!"

"Looks like it's made of gold."

"Hoho, it would suit me perfectly well if I wore it."

The clear female voices I heard while sightseeing this and that with Joong Hyun.

Seo Ye-rin.

The representative of Daehan High School's first years, she was the embodiment of beauty. With a height of 167 cm (5'5"), long black hair, big eyes, and milky, porcelain skin. She was a goddess with a graceful disposition, a rare item any guy would want to call their own.

Today as well, she was blooming like an exceptionally brilliant, elegant lily among the chattering weeds. Her long black hair was neatly held back with a plain-looking blue headband, her smile was more beautiful than the moonlight in May.

She was looking at a hairpin through a small window with some friends. Her ebony eyes, which matched her distinctively pale white skin, were shining.

"Is there something good? Hehe."

More friendly with the girls than the male students due to his cheeky nature, Joong Hyun thoughtlessly dragged me straight into the girls.

And then. In that moment, the girls turned their heads and I happened to meet eyes with Ye-rin.

Smile

With my appearance, a gentle smile came onto Seo Ye-rin lips.

'Whoa? Is she smiling right now while looking at me?'

I was a person who had graduated from the brutal wilderness hell that baby lions experienced, right at the age when kids graduated from elementary school and began yearning for manhood. Having set aside women in order to get accepted into Daehan High School, this school was truly my dream school.

Contrary to the idea that people who studied well were physically unattractive, the school had some rather charming women.

The saying that accomplished children rose from humble families was entirely a thing of the past. These days, with the waters so dirtied from pollution, you could only raise an accomplished child by maintaining a high quality environment. A world that was truly heartless and specialized. That was how the world where such high caliber children were raised was maintained.

"Wow! So pretty!"

Having squeezed in between the girls, Joong Hyun was looking at the platinum hairpin, which was embedded with many blue jewels.

"It's well made."

The hairpin was so exquisite and vintage that my mother's collection of jewel hairpins couldn't even compare. Shaped like a long shell, the hairpin was enough to make even a guy like me desire it.

"Whoa!"

However, I exclaimed at the logical price tag.

'\$10,000... oh my god!'

The hairpin was worth a fortune of ten thousand dollars. I couldn't close my gaping mouth.

"It's pretty, right, Hyuk?"

When I was gaping like that and being surprised, I heard what must surely be an auditory hallucination at my ear.

A woman's voice that was like the tinkling of a mystical silver bell was affectionately speaking my name.

"Huh?"

It was the voice of an elegant lily that had just started to bloom, Seo Ye-rin. The being who possessed looks and intellectual beauty far more delightful than any of the members from the popular Maiden's Generation or Girl's Night had called my name.

[T/N: Spoof of Girl's Generation and Girl's Day, popular Kpop girl groups.]

"It's worth looking at, I guess."

But I replied with a voice so apathetic that it surprised even me.

"Really? I think it's really pretty..."

As if hurt by my words, the lily looked worried.

'Kya, if you were to wear it, you'd be the ultimate goddess of beauty.'

Those who had looks and smarts like Ye-rin's should be nationally protected.

'For it to be ten thousand dollars... tch.'

If I could, I wanted to give one to her as a present. But being the still young lion that I was, I hadn't yet been raised to the level of making money.

"Seo Ye-rin, should I buy you one as a souvenir?"

'What's with this rude voice?'

Near the sacred contact place where I was talking to Ye-rin for the first time, I heard an arrogant, cocky voice. A mean little lion had sauntered over here with two baby wolves by his side.

'Hwang Sung-taek.'

Called the Crown Prince among the first years, he was the brat trying to dominate with his rank as the eldest son of the Ohsung group. He was still young in his years, yet the punk's face was full of boredom. The hyena brat was raking my lily's body with a lustful gaze.

"No thanks."

At Hwang Sung-taek's words, Seo Ye-rin transformed into a rose adorned with scary thorns. Leaving behind those cold words, she walked away.

"Haha! Just let me know, anytime. I always have space for you in my generous heart." Hwang Sung-taek spat out a boorish line to the back of the leaving Seo Ye-rin.

'What a waste.'

It had been a golden opportunity to get closer to Ye-rin, a strangely feeling encounter with Seo Ye-rin on this foreign land. A nuisance had flown in before our meeting could even get started properly.

"Let's go, Joong Hyun."

"Hm? O-okay."

There was no reason to stick around Hwang Sung-taek and his cronies.

"Kang Hyuk, lemme give you some advice."

The moment I was about to leave with Joong Hyun, I heard Hwang Sung-taek's cold voice.

"What?"

There was no need for me, a 185 cm (6') tall Taekwondo fourth-degree black belt and Kumdo 3rd dan, to cower. I turned my head and looked down on the 170 cm (5'7") loser Hwang Sung-taek.

[T/N: Kumdo is the Korean version of Kendo.]

"Seo Ye-rin is mine. If you want to go through school life peacefully, keep your head down."

Emboldened by the two wolf pups by his side, Hwang Sung-taek was getting ahead of himself. He didn't know a single thing about me. The only things I feared in this world were my parents and our family motto of 'truth.'"

With a smirk, I lightly tapped Hwang Sung-taek's shoulder.

"Hwang Sung-taek. You, do you know who you owe for living so well?"

"...."

At my sudden words, Hwang Sung-taek was briefly stunned.

"If I were to say, I'd say that it'd be the major shareholder who has a whole 10% of Ohsung's shares. You owe your livelihood to them, so you shouldn't live so recklessly."

Hwang Sung-taek made a dumbfounded expression at my words.

"If you keep throwing your money around like this, your grandpappy who nicely cultivated the stockholders will..."

Swish.

Instead of using words, I drew a line over my neck.

"Do your best, kiddo."

Tap, tap.

I tapped Hwang Sung-taek's skimpy shoulder once again before turning around.

"St-stop right there, you crappy piece of dog shit!"

But I didn't stop, since I wasn't a dog shit.

Swoosh!

Just then, I felt the energy of a fist flying towards my back.

Bam!

I instinctively whirled around and kicked out.

"Gaah!"

And, seeing the foot that had stopped right in front of his chin, the little wolf pup froze without even breathing. In front of the dominating lion, the fools were trembling like dogs.

"I'll only warn you once. Next time... you'll pay."

There was no need to say much. For these guys who couldn't even be called bullies, it was a waste to use my fist.

"Tch."

Hundreds of kids had been let loose into the Golden Lane. From all over, kids were shouting and having a good time. Joong Hyun had also somehow disappeared in the press of people. Always the devoted son, he had gone to pick out a present for his mom.

'Why is this alley so quiet?'

I had split away from the kids who were having fun with the ample pocket money they had gotten from their parents, and was looking around when I noticed a small alley. It wasn't very different from other alleys, but there were no people to be seen inside. Actually, the others were busy passing by, as if they couldn't even see the alley.

'Huhu, the good stuff is in places like this. Those idiots.'

Regardless of how heartlessly my parents treated me, they were my irreplaceable father and mother. It was now time to purchase a present for them. We had to return to Korea tomorrow, so today was the last chance for shopping.

"Goodness, these days you can see Korean letters even in a place like this."

Before entering the alley, I had seen the familiar creations of the King Sejong the Great written in large letters in front of the shops. Perhaps as a testament to how many Koreans had come here, after English and Japanese, there was a sentence written in Korean in front of the shop doors.

[T/N: A bit of Korean history — King Sejong invented the modern written Korean language. Before, Chinese-derived characters were used.]

The sentence was this: 'It's cheap. Come take a look. However, no bargaining.'

My face flushed. I couldn't explain my feeling of embarrassment.

“Great Wizard? Archmage?”

Raising my flushed face, I checked out the deserted alley and saw a small store. It had blue-tinted windows, so I couldn't look inside. But an English word, Archmage, had been written on the door.

‘What’s this? Are they the descendant of an alchemist?’

For some reason, my curiosity was sparked.

‘Should I go in?’

Even if this place wasn't well known, there was sure to be something nice in a small store like this where people didn't frequent. That definitely had to be the case. Currently, my wallet was so light that there was more dust in there than money.

Ti-ring.

A clear bell sounded as I opened the heavy wooden door.

‘Wo-aah!’

An exclamation burst out of me on its own.

It looked like a small shop you couldn't expect anything from on the

outside, but it was full of handicrafts that you could tell were amazing masterpieces in one glance. From jeweled cases to earrings, necklaces, hairpins, and all sorts of accessories, there were even ceramics that clearly looked antique and baubles that looked as if nobles from the Middle Ages would have used them.

Gulp.

I swallowed my saliva.

'Jackpot.'

Moreover, I saw a generous-looking old man dozing. With a white beard that reached down to his belly and stylishly wearing an ivory-colored robe, he really was like the Gandalf who appeared in the movies.

'If this goes well, it could be frickin' awesome.'

I had heard through internet news stories that treasures capable of turning your life around were found in antique stores like this. A tingly feeling of expectation filled me with excitement.

'Kuku, this is gonna be cake.'

The Czech grandpa looked friendly for sure. He was napping with a large crystal ball in front of him.

"Ahem! A-hem!"

First off, I woke the grandpa up by clearing my throat. Maybe because I had grown up in the eastern land of courtesy, I first wanted to let him know that a customer had come.

‘Huh?’

But even at my throat clearing, Gandalf didn’t open his eyes at all. He made a look of annoyance as if hearing a dog bark and continued to sleep while rubbing his ear.

‘Is, is he a master?’

There was a saying that when a storekeeper reached the highest level, he could tell if a customer was rich or not simply from their smell. The fact that he didn’t get up even though I had come in was definitely because he had accurately determined that I was poor.

But I wasn’t one to retreat like this.

It was a certain fact that if I were to get even one of the items in this store, my parents wouldn’t call me a rude brat anymore.

“H-hi!”

[T/N: He says this in English.]

I raised my hand and flashed off a friendly, Western style smile. I

predicted that if I didn't have money, I might be able to get something if I was friendly.

Woosh. In that instant, the drowsing Gandalf's eyes opened wide. And then, he delivered a shocking message.

"What's with the rude 'hi'? If you're in front of an adult, you should immediately lower your head. Tsk tsk, kids these days are..."

Coming into my ears was the all too familiar, perfectly spoken Korean. If not for his looks, Gandalf had such an outstanding command of an elder's Korean speech that one might believe he was a village old timer.

"You, you don't have money, right?"

Following that, Gandalf loosed a critical hit.

My body stiffened in a state of shock. Under the unfamiliar skies of eastern Europe, I had met a grandpa who was Czech in appearance only. Even I, who had nothing to fear, went under mental overload at this sudden situation.

'H-how did he know that I was Korean? And what's with that natural native accent!'

For the first time in my life, I experienced the feeling of being thunderstruck. No, after the remark about my parent's wilderness simulation, this was the second time.

I stared at Gandalf's golden eyes with a blank look.

"Kuku. You're wondering how I knew you were Korean, right? And how I can speak Korean this well, right?"

'Maybe he's a Western shaman?'

If he hadn't possessed me, then how else could he know my inner thoughts so well? I realized I was unknowingly nodding and returned to my senses.

'Is, is he seriously a mage? Heh, no way...'

The shop name that had been written on the sign, "Archmage," flashed through my head. But no matter how I thought about it, there was no way a mage could exist in a world where tombs were made on the moon.

"That's right, I'm a mage."

"Ah!"

'That's... ridiculous!'

Was he saying that there were people who could read minds? This foreign shaman was boldly calling himself a magician, one that didn't just use trickery. He was definitely wrong in the head.

"Who are you?"

I gulped anxiously as I asked his identity. Though it wasn't as if I had received my formal education on fantasy, there was no sane person in this world who would seriously call themselves a mage. Especially if that person looked as if they were long past their prime.

"Tsk, tsk. Kids these days don't believe in what adults say. D'you think I would lie at an age like this?"

His folksy command of the language just kept flowing from his mouth. It felt as if this wasn't a shop in the Czech Republic, but in Korea.

'I've been possessed by a ghost. It's probably because I haven't eaten any kimchi in the past few days.'

No matter how many times I heard it, I just couldn't get used to Gandalf's native fluency.

'This is dangerous.'

A warning sizzled up my spine and sparked through my body. I could feel a bizarre feeling emanating from the crazy Czech man who called himself a so-called mage. And now I also noticed letters and figures of an unknown language in the shop. It occurred to me that it might be the rune language that appeared in fantasy novels.

I hesitantly made my way over to the door.

"What, you're just gonna leave? If you don't have money, I could just give it to you..."

At those words, my legs ignored their owner's will and stopped right there.

'FREE!'

A reward quest that was worth the danger!

'That's right, in a global world like today, he might be able to speak a foreign language. And he might be able to read a person's intent a bit. Since he's that old, he must've learned mind reading or something.'

My mind suddenly scrambled to comfort itself.

I flashed my signature detached smile to Gandalf, who was scanning me with his unknowable, peculiar eyes.

"Ha, haha! You are truly fluent in Korean."

Even as I spoke, my eyes were working hard to scan every part of my surroundings. At that age, he probably wouldn't lie. My eyes locked onto the item that would cost the most.

'My luck today is good.'

Starting with a conversation with Ye-rin, I had happened to stumble into a store called "Archmage." The only problem was that the owner had otaku fantasy mania, but other than that, there was no problem.

"I'm not lying. Out of the items here, pick out the one you want the most. I'll give it to you as a present."

This mage grandpa, who looked as good-natured as the Gandalf from the Lord of the Rings! At his incredible offer, my lips went from ear to ear.

'Kuhaha! Jackpooooot!'

I had no idea that something like this would happen in this tough world.

"You do not have to go so far, but since an adult said so, I will swallow my sense of honor and pick one."

Before he went back on his words, I picked up a silver bracelet that had drawn me to it the moment I had laid eyes on it.

'Even if this big thing is a fake, I think it'll make some money. Huhu, this is frickin' awesome!'

The silver bracelet was engraved with unknown patterns and letters. Glowing with a silver-platinum color, it was clearly a high class rare item.

Furthermore, there were shining stones that looked like diamonds embedded inside the silver bracelet. Even if it was a fake, it looked like it would fetch quite a price.

'I'm strangely drawn to it.'

There were a number of other ornaments and items made out of gold, but I was peculiarly attracted to this silver bracelet. I could feel a shimmering energy so faint I might be imagining it from the bracelet.

"Kukuku. Right, I see. Of course."

As soon as I raised the bracelet, Gandalf gramps nodded as he said something insensible.

'Let's run!'

Now that he had picked one out, Gandalf gramps could change his mind. With my thoughts of running away, my head went down to a 90 degree angle.

"Thank you for the meal."

Because I had been raised under polite home discipline, I sincerely relayed my thanks. Then, I turned around.

'Puhaha! This is so awesome!'

I really liked this bracelet. Just holding it gave me the feeling that I had become rich.

Ker-chunk.

'Huh?'

But that was as far as I went. The shop door wouldn't open no matter how hard I tried. Despite my physical strength, the door wouldn't budge, as if it were stuck shut with the strongest super glue.

"Huhu..."

And then, a sinister laugh.

All my hairs stood on end.

'St-stingy. He won't tell me to give it back, right?'

If it became a contest of strength, Gandalf gramps had nothing on me. But since I couldn't do something like that, I'd have to give it back. No matter how much I wanted it, I wanted to avoid getting imprisoned as a thief in a Czech jail.

"Since you've gotten a present, let's go."

"What?"

Surprised by Gandalf gramps' sudden words of going, I turned my head.

"Ah!"

Right there and then, I felt myself freeze again.

Psssssss.

At some point, Gandalf gramps had raised a strange stick. An intense, blue light was pouring into the room.

"Why, why are you doing this? Isn't this free?"

My lips disregarded my will and trembled.

"Free? Of course it's free. That is, if you can survive. Kuhahahahaha!"

This time, my hands started shaking.

Gandalf gramps had suddenly changed. He emanated a brilliance that was truly like that of an archmage.

'Shit! What's with this ridiculous situation?'

At the powerful force Gandalf was exuding, I couldn't speak. I could only hear a single, friendly word by my ear.

"Sleep!"

A magic incantation that only appeared in fantasy novels! I felt my entire body getting enveloped in a wave of enormous energy.

Then I tightly closed my eyes. Unable to toss aside the delusion of "free," I was still gripping the silver bracelet.

'Ah, fuck...'

Inconceivably horrified, I coughed out a short breath and was plunged into a deep sleep.

I couldn't have even imagined my very first thrilling taste of magic or the future ahead of me.

Hellish Magic Training

'Gaaaahh!'

A tingly energy made my whole body prickle as if I'd been bitten by bugs.

"As the important component of elements like the sky, earth, fire, wind, and water, mana is the driving force that operates the world. For a long time, humans desired to make mana into their own strength. Using the boundless talent granted to them by the great god Adeine, humans sought a method to use nature's power for many years."

Tzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz.

I opened my eyes and glared at old fart Bumdalf, who had pretended to be Gandalf. It was one thing to annoy someone while they were asleep, but this old fart Bumdalf had also put me on top of a strange magic circle that made sparks and was now giving a long speech. Even among kooky old men, there probably wasn't one who was this much of a nutcase.

'That was no damn magic; he definitely put sleeping powder on the bracelet.'

I couldn't believe it even though I tried. How could magic exist within a civilization that used cutting edge technology? If magicians truly existed, then they would have already appeared in Youtube videos.

“Magic puts emphasis on communicating with nature. The hard-won fruit of the ancients who worked to harness the strength of that nature was the creation of magic. Thus the magic language, or rune language, was born. Some said that magic was an amusement of man, gifted to them by the grace of a dragon. While others said that magic was a seed of evil planted in the human world by demons. But that was the ignorant manifestation of a sense of defeat by the foolish. The true root of magic was humans. The master of the world, the great god Adeine, had chosen only the humans.”

I was one step away from being driven insane by the shocking wave of electricity that was rippling through my body, but this Bumdalf was going on and on about a ridiculous magic theory.

‘Could it be mad cow disease?’

How else could he write out a fantasy novel that calmly, If he wasn’t somehow wrong in the head? Even in my pain, I couldn’t help but be suspicious of the mad cow disease that was still prevalent in Europe.

“But the fertile age of magic did not last long. Addicted to the present dimension’s mana, magicians of darkness opened another dimension and summoned monsters from the demon world, bringing about a terrible ravenous ambition that would swallow the world. And thus began the long, long war between humans and the magicians of darkness. It could be called a proxy war between gods and devils, a divine war.”

Hearing old fart Bumdalf so fully immersed in emotion, as if telling a story from long ago, even I was made to listen closely despite my pain.

“And then, the dragon appeared. A dragon from another dimension was summoned by the great god’s permission in order to preserve mankind, which had been driven to near extinction. Thus the First Divine War ended. The humans, who had once been the rulers of the land, entered a long, long period of a magic ice age, while suffering the contempt of the dragon and other races.”

As if he were really that angry, Bumdalf was grinding his teeth.

‘Tsk tsk, he’s totally off his rocker.’

It seemed like the man had written a proper fantasy novel with his imagination. There was no way something like that could have happened in the history of the earth. Of course, Bumdalf had said that magic users had existed, but no human would have had the guts to fight a war with devils. Besides the hotshot bluffing warriors who appeared in Greek and Roman myths, of course.

“That’s why I became a mage. I wanted to return everyone who dared to disrupt the land that mankind should have ruled over—the demons, the various races, and even the dragon—to whence they came. For myself, the Archmage Aidal!”

The real name of this Czech gramps who was incessantly spewing madness was Aidal.

My fear withered away and instead, pity filled my heart.

‘Well, in this rough world, it’s probably not too bad to become so fully

crazy.'

If you were only half crazy you'd probably be called a weirdo, but if you were to become perfectly bat-shit crazy, then no one would be able to call you out. For someone like that, even a mental hospital would pay money to reject someone like that.

"Kekeke, I trained in magic like crazy, and became an 8th Circle mage, a stage hadn't been reached in all of human history. And that was when I was exactly ninety-nine years old, too."

'Tch, this is interesting.'

When writing a novel, you had to write it with realistic lies like that to make it fun. Even while in electrifying pain, I could feel that I was engrossed. The feeling was like coming across an interesting work after a very long period of time.

No matter how you sliced it, old fart Bumdalf Aidal didn't look much older than seventy. Proudly saying that he had become an Archmage at age ninety-nine, that mental world of his was admirable. Even so, it didn't seem like he was paint-the-walls-with-poop level crazy. Rather, he came across as a pure and beautiful soul who was still dreaming about a fantasy. Even Don Quixote would call him an elder brother.

[E/N: Guv'nor, for you Brits out there.]

'Now all that needs to come up is dimensional travel.'

Pleased, I tried my hand at predicting the next part of the story.

"But that was as far as I went. Even during the lost Magic Era, the 9th Circle was a godly domain not permitted to humans. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't rise to the 9th Circle. Bloody hell, damn it...'

He spat out the very familiar words: bloody hell and damn it.

There had to be such frustration in order to proceed with the story.

"Even though I wanted to attain 9th Circle magic and attempt a mana change! Like a dragon, I wanted to become a handsome man through polymorph magic and have all the world's women... Argggghh!"

Now he was suddenly spouting a very human idea.

'H-have all the world's women... Guh!"

Pained from the shock that followed his frustration, Bumdalf Aidal didn't even look to see what kind of shock I was in, and continued with the next part of the story.

"Ahem, even so, it was still worth living. Before I knew it, I became the master of a magic tower, and every empire and kingdom was desperate to curry favor with me. Kuku, worldly treasures and endless research funds poured in at the start of every year. I passed a hundred years of age and was somehow able to find solace. I could restore my youth to some extent with 8th Circle magic anyways, so I was able to hit it off with the fresh chicks in no time at all! If only I hadn't met that bastard. Urgh!"

Aidal's life story was getting more exciting. I knew it was fiction, but my ears were sharply tuned in to his forceful melodrama. There was still a tinge of tingliness in my body, but I was so immersed in the story that I was able to forget about that pain.

"T'was a very windy day. When I had just finished writing a polite letter asking every kingdom to quickly send me the princesses who would become my wives, that bastard appeared. He was a truly shit-faced bastard!"

Even I was curious about who it was.

The story was pretty watertight. I felt like if I could just return to Korea, even I could debut as a writer with this story as a base.

"It was a shock. A bastard who hadn't even reached his forties challenged me to a magic duel. Me, this 8th Circle Archmage Aidal-nim!"

As if recalling that moment, lightning sizzled from Bumdalf Aidal's eyes.

'The dragon came for fun? Or a devil?'

I tried guessing who had appeared.

"At first, I thought he was a silly novice and magnanimously showed him mercy. My temper is as sharp as a blade, so I normally just burn the little shits that charge at me, alive. But I held back since that was a

felicitous day when I had made my first step towards getting married.”

‘M-maybe he’s not an Archmage, but a sorcerer instead? And one that made the world quiver, at that...’

Otherwise there would be no reason for empires and kingdoms to send him bribes, and an old man like him wouldn’t have been able to send invitations to bring forth the princesses. If he had been an honorable, good-tempered mage, he wouldn’t have even dreamt of getting married at a hundred years of age.

“But the bastard just smirked at me. Kyaa, I was crazy. To have agreed to the duel without knowing that I was being baited.”

Though it was fun to listen to a story like this while eating chicken and drinking a cola, my regrettable situation didn’t allow that— it was lacking by just 3%.

“At first I very lightly tried to burn the bastard to death with a 3rd Circle Lightning magic. But the guy dodged with an Air Shield, as if he’d been waiting for it. I thought to myself that he was pretty good. To be at the 4th Circle at that age, he was on the level of geniuses.”

For being such a ripe old gentleman, he sure commanded a rich vocabulary. It didn’t sound awkward at all to me.

“That roused my interest a bit. So this time, I resolved myself and unleashed Burn Flare, a 5th Circle magic. Since I was serious, it was a powerful magic that could destroy a pretty good castle wall, you see. But

no, that rotten, moldy, son of a bitch deflected it with a Fire Ball! I mean, does it make sense for a 5th Circle magic used by a 8th Circle mage to be blocked by a 2nd Circle magic?!"

The moment Bumdalf asked me, I found myself shaking my head. According to my fantasy knowledge, that was impossible.

"I felt something was wrong then and should have stopped. But being a hundred years old and still in my prime, I lacked patience."

"...."

Aidal was nonchalantly spouting words that were three or four times beyond just being surprising. I waited for the next part of the story with anticipation.

"My anger boiled over. So then, I prepared the 7th Circle magic that I had spent several minutes memorizing every day just in case. Since 7th Circle mages were the upper limit in all the magic towers and empire courts at the time, I thought it would end there with that. But no, that shitty, poop-faced bastard just fanned himself with his hand as if it were hot inside that 7th Circle Blizzard magic and refused to fall over! Gaah, I'm so fucking mad."

I could see it all in my mind's eye. To think there was a guy who would fan himself inside a 7th Circle magic!

'Next, next!'

This situation had escalated while I had been asleep. About now, the school field trip group was probably in an uproar because of my disappearance, but I couldn't just stop here. The properly senile Bumdalf gramps' story was so interesting that it made my hands sweat.

'It's a dragon. Definitely.'

Making my own guesses was a great deal of fun.

"So rude. For a newborn calf who was probably in his forties to block a 7th Circle magic... kyaaa, I didn't know that the bastard had a skill that wasn't magic, but something else."

"Wh-what was it?"

"You, you thought to yourself that it was a dragon, right? Haaah, it also suddenly occurred to me at that point that it might be the dragon looking for some fun, but it wasn't. Even if it was a dragon just playing around, as a 8th Circle mage, I could surely recognize that energy."

'It's not? Then what is it?'

I cursed my lack of imagination and blankly stared at Bumdalf's white beard.

"The only option left was to use 8th Circle magic. Actually, there aren't very many 8th Circle attack magics. But each and every one has enormous power capable of destroying a fair-sized castle or so. Haah, to think that I completed such magic."

The gramps was tooting his own horn, and I was once again able to confirm that there was no cure for this man.

‘Seriously, how does the next part of the story go!’

Even if I died, I wanted to hear the next part.

“It was then.”

As if he knew my burning desire, Bumdalf gramps opened his wrinkled lips again.

“That was when that Orc penis shitface put forth a devilish proposal.”

The foul-mouthed Bumdalf used curses like Korean teenagers did. I was incredibly curious about the Orc dingus’ proposal.

“He said that if I finished his incomplete magic circle, he would admit his defeat. Actually, not to brag, but I wasn’t just the best at Circle magic, but also at magic circles and theory, including alchemy.”

This Bumdalf gramps showered himself with praises every time he opened his mouth.

“Of course, you agreed, right?”

Having gotten used to the prickly energy digging into my body, I directly expressed my curiosity.

“Yes, of course I did. I knew every type of magic circle that existed at that time. Actually, if I just knew the principle, I could easily figure it out by using my head a bit. There was no magic circle that this marvelously brilliant Archmage Aidal could not solve. Keuhahahaha!”

Now it was perfectly clear. A person had to be defeatable to be worth fighting. It was just a guess, but fearing that he wouldn't be able to do anything with magic, Bumdalf had probably fallen for the Orc dingus' scheme.

“Ah! But the magic circle inside the bizarre cave that the rotten bastard led me to was one I had never seen before in my life. To think it was a magic circle from the lost Magic Era! That scoundrel!”

‘Magic Era? The Magic Era before the Divine War?’

“But since I had already promised, I was helplessly trapped there and had to finish the magic circle. No, that magic circle aroused my passion for research for the first time in ages. It was more than enough to excite me.”

Of course that was the case. For a mage who was stuck at the highest stage and unable to advance further, it was obvious that he would be more intrigued by an unsolvable magic theory than worldly matters.

“For a few years, I researched the magic circle to death. A good several

meters in size, there were dozens of high-level rune characters engraved in the large magic circle. I interpreted the runes and figures one by one and worked towards completing the loose ends. And with such speed that those little brats couldn't have even imagined, too."

'Brats? It wasn't just one person?'

My questions grew.

"And then, one day, I was able to complete the magic circle. Puhahahaha! I perfectly analyzed and completed the magic circle from the great Magic Era, which even the legendary dragon wouldn't have been able to complete."

'What impressive tenacity!'

I was filled with awe for Bumdalf Aidal's copious imagination, which allowed him to spout fantasies so vivid it felt as if he had truly lived it. It was enough to make me determined to become perfectly insane like that if I were to ever go crazy.

"That's when the bastards appeared. Eeuurgh! Those despicable bastards, who wheedled the great Archmage Aidal-nim into fulfilling their own ambitions! That's when I realized. That the one who had tricked me into a duel was Yasmahal, the master of the Golden Magic Tower, a secret group, and that every kingdom and empire's court mages were involved. It was a plot devised by the underling mage shits to eliminate me, a great Archmage! Keuaaaaahh!"

Laughing and then crying, this Bumdalf Aidal mage was sure to have a bushy bottom. He even shed tears as he agonized.

TN: In Korea, people jokingly say that if you laugh and cry at the same time, your butt will get hairy.

‘Wow~! He’s really good at acting!’

He was delivering the perfect, full package of empathy. It was so convincing that one might believe he was a real Archmage.

“Keuhaha. But I couldn’t do as the bastards wanted. If they found out about the completed magic circle, it was certain that all the magic techniques from the Magic Era would fall into their wicked hands. Those stupid brats...”

Lightning shot out like lasers from his eyes.

“The bastards laughed. They laughed at me, who had squandered several years trapped like a fool in their scheme while under the guard of master level knights. But I laughed back at them. They had no idea that the magic circle they had led me to was a Dimensional Travel magic circle. Huhuhu.”

“Ah!”

Upon hearing that it was a Dimensional Travel magic circle, an exclamation inadvertently burst out of me.

'M-maybe he's really a mage?'

I thought he wasn't, but the foreboding feeling in my heart was blaring out a warning.

"And as they watched, I activated the Dimensional Travel magic circle. While silently clenching my teeth... Keuhaha, those idiots. There was no way they could figure out the magic circle no matter how much they struggled. After I, the great Archmage Aidal-nim had perfectly mastered the magic circle, I had modified it to only activate by my method. Kuhahahaha!"

Aidal was holding his belly while laughing delightedly. I didn't know why he looked so pitiful then.

'Idiot, in the end, doesn't that mean you used dimensional travel to run away?'

It seemed like the poor fool hadn't found a way back home yet. If this was all true, of course.

'But is there really a world like that?'

My curiosity grew and grew inside my heart. If what Bumdalf Aidal had said was true, then I wanted to go there at least once. A totally different world that Aidal had agitated after becoming an Archmage. For all the Koreans who were living a painful reality, they might desire such a world.

"So then, you were chosen."

‘Eh?’

While I had been briefly lost in thought, Aidal’s calm voice were like a cold splash of water. Aidal had somehow regained his composure and was looking at me with flashing, golden eyes.

“W-what?”

“Huhuhu. You’ll go instead of me and take revenge.”

“Go, go where?”

“Where else? Did you think I was spouting lies up ‘til now? I’m talking about Kallian Continent, where I lived!”

This bad-natured Bumdalf had suddenly gotten mad and was berating someone who had done nothing wrong.

“Why do I have to be the one to go? If someone goes, shouldn’t it be Bumdal—, no Aidal-nim? One can only live their later years in peace if they solve their own problems and finish what they started!”

I wanted to get away from this crazy old man. I had a bad feeling that he would send me to that other world if he was really a Bumdalf.

“Don’t wanna. I’m going to live comfortably now. Now that I’m nearing two hundred years of age, my joints are creaky and I don’t even have

much of an appetite. Where are you telling your old master to go?"

"Ma-master?"

"That's right, master. You accepted my proposal and even got a present."

"When? When did I get a present... ah! No way?"

I suddenly felt something cold on my wrist. Somehow the silver bracelet had wrapped itself around my left wrist.

"You and I have already undergone a mana succession ritual. You're now no different from a clone of me, Aidal. Kuhahaha!"

This crazy Bumdalf was even laughing uproariously.

'Father! Mother!'

I suddenly thought of my parents' unfriendly faces. Why I wanted to see them so much today was a mystery.

"If you've rested, then let's start again."

"S-start what?"

Aidal's actions were so unpredictable.

“What else? It’s the original Mana Injection magic circle I developed for this day. Alright, prepare yourself. I’m activating it for real now.”

“Wait! Please wait!” I called out to Bumdalf, who had frighteningly raised a staff while wearing a wicked smile. “This went through a safety inspection, right?”

Glowing with a number of opaque colors, this existence that was called a magic circle didn’t seem like it had been properly made, considering Aidal’s condition.

“Dunno. Some of the magic crystals were made in China, so there’s no guarantee. Then, here we go! Power up!”

ZIIIIIIIIINNNGGG!

“GAAAARGGGHH!”

Without a chance to be surprised by his words that it was made in China, I was assailed by a surging energy. The last thing I remembered seeing was Bumdalf’s evil face. And then I was out, while desperately praying to God that this was all a dream.

* * *

“Fire Bolt!”

I concentrated and unleashed Fire Bolt, a 1st Circle attack magic, at a rabbit.

Ba-ba-bam!

But what kind of nice rabbit would let itself get hit by a lame mage's Fire Bolt? Surprised by the magic that hit the ground, the rabbit began to scamper away.

"Stop! Hey! At least leave a leg behind! Little bunny! Little bunny!"

What I had received as weapons were a single chipped dagger and some lame 1st Circle attack magics.

I idiotically chased after the rabbit, which was running through the meadow with its rump quivering behind it, as if it were being chased by a pervert.

'STOP! I said stop! Waaah!'

If I couldn't catch the rabbit, I'd starve for the second day in a row. Even Lineage, a popular game these days, probably didn't torment their beginner players like this.

"Pant, pant...!"

But the rabbit paid no heed to my desperate wish and ran far away.

Flop. I breathed heavily as I laid down in the thickly grown wild flowers.

"Damn... I'm gonna go crazy."

I felt like I was going to go crazy from this absolutely unbelievable reality. While suffering after meeting a crazy mage during my cool eastern Europe school excursion, in this moment, even though she always calculated the cost of the food, I longed for my mom's kimchi stew so much I could cry.

'Haah, so that's how it is, this was all planned.'

Right now, I was in some unknown grassland area in Iceland, Europe. It was a month since I woke up after dying from the original Mana Injection magic circle, which used Chinese-made magic crystals. Exhausted, I had opened my eyes to this place.

'For a mage to really exist... And for him to be a mage who used dimensional travel from a different world, too...'

Everything was unbelievable. The fact that Bumdalf was an Archmage was particularly unimaginable.

'So he rigged an illusion magic circle in the Golden Lane and was having fun fishing, in order to find only the mana-sensitive people among the tourists.'

While I was on the Mana Injection magic circle and resting, he had told me countless things. Bumdalf Aidal master had dimensionally traveled to

an unfamiliar planet. He told me that at the time, a science-based civilization had begun to develop since the entire planet had been at the peak of the Industrial Revolution.

In such a world, he used magic to easily adjust and make a fortune. Back then, the earth hadn't been so polluted and mana had been rather abundant, so apparently he had been able to do all sorts of things with magic.

He used magic to become a medicine peddler selling a panacea, entered a university to become a professor with his outstanding intellect, met Rockefeller and even tried digging for oil with mana detection. He even told me that he had happened to meet Einstein while eating out and indirectly told him about the mana correlation theory that stated that time and space were closely related, thus leading him to publish the world's general theory of relativity and nurturing him into a great scientist.

These facts couldn't be confirmed, but I had no choice but to believe them.

Aidal, who called himself a master. Surprisingly enough, I was able to confirm with various pieces of evidence that he had enormous riches exceeding those of Bill Gates, piled up in several places.

There was an underground magic tower with dozens of floors in size not far from where I was training. and inside, treasures and all kinds of rare items I'd never seen or heard of were scattered about like rubbish.

'This greedy Bumdalf!'

Just thinking about it made me angry. He had amassed a fortune in the world for about a hundred years. But right now, to me, he was only a truly cruel, sicko of mage.

I could forgive everything up to the magic circle he had made. I knew from my half-baked fantasy knowledge that magic started with feeling mana and accumulating it. But the special training that occurred afterwards... Though I wasn't even some character in a game, he made me undergo this survival special training with one dagger and the 1st Circle attack magic that I had just started to learn.

Grrroowl.

'I'm hungry. Shit.'

The clouds floating past in the sky started to look like the menu items from the food stall in front of the school— odeng, kimbap, and all kinds of tempuras.

[T/N: Odeng is processed fishcake in a light broth. In Korea, food stalls like this sell cheap food in little cups. So good.]

'If this goes on, I could starve to death.'

My callous master Bumdalf, whose sanity wandered to and fro... It was currently my highest priority to survive under him.

‘I see, that’s it! Huhuhu. I didn’t think of that.’

While losing my sanity from hunger, I suddenly thought of a spell.

“Little bunny, you’re dead now.”

Many rabbits had bred in this grassy area. While thinking of the magic that had popped into my head, I searched for a rabbit. And then, with my hand clumsily drawing out an incantation, my magic will manifested.

“Oh! A rabbit!”

Just then, I spotted a fluffy rabbit munching on grass just several meters away. As the rabbit turned to look at me, I completed the magic incantation.

* * *

Ba-ba-bam!

“Wow! He caught it!”

Fwooooosh.

[T/N: Sound of fire.]

‘Geh! To think he’s already at that stage.’

Kang Hyuk was the first disciple he had managed to get in years. Hiding himself with invisibility magic, Aidal hovered around his disciple. In this wilderness, there were fierce predators, including black bears. In a place like this, a disaster could occur to his disciple, who had just learned 1st Circle magic.

‘I guessed he would be talented, but to think that he would grow accustomed to magic that fast.’

1st Circle mages were more than plentiful on the Kallian Continent. If you had even a little mana affinity, you could learn 1st Circle magic. But Kang Hyuk was fundamentally different from those sloppy mages. Though he had come to be able to feel mana through the Mana Injection magic circle, there weren’t many people who could learn 1st Circle magic that quickly. Even he himself, Aidal, who had been called an uncommon magic genius, was only really able to use mana after three months. But this Korean boy named Kang Hyuk had used mana breathing within one month to utilize mana. Not only that, but he had simply made and used a Fire Ball even though he hadn’t been taught how to.

“Kuhahaha! I’m a genius after all!”

Having succeeded in hunting a rabbit by burning an area with fire, Kang Hyuk laughed heartily.

A faint smile appeared on Aidal’s lips. He began to feel more warmth towards Kang Hyuk, who didn’t give up and was doing his best, despite having been forced to become Aidal’s disciple.

‘You rascal, you might think you’re a genius, but starting from tomorrow, I’ll make you swallow those words. Kuku.’

Aidal had also learned magic like this. He had started as a combat mage rather than a theory mage, and had received the title of the Golden-Eyed Reaper Aidal. He knew that there was nothing more important in magic training than being desperate. Mana didn’t easily allow happiness if you didn’t work to the death for it. Everything in the world was like that, but magic was even more so.

Mana— the more you loved her, the more she danced for you.

* * *

“As you know, the circle has been added to your body’s mana field.”

‘I know that too, you evil Archmage-nim!’

Sitting with my legs crossed, I shoved master Bumdalf’s words deep into my memory.

“Mana breathing exists even in the Kallian Continent. The knights have a breathing technique exclusive to the knights, the mages have a technique for the just the mages, and the summoners have one for summoners— The techniques are passed down respectively. Even I wasn’t able to find out why each one is different when I was on the continent. But on the Earth, after meeting him, it became glaringly obvious to me.”

After becoming sure that he was a mage, I didn’t ignore master Aidal

words. No matter the reason why, as long as I was sure he wouldn't release me back into the world, I needed everything I could get to survive. Plus, by nature, I was the type to cling on and see things to the end no matter what, so I was determined to challenge this Andromeda-level, fourth dimension subject.

"While I was traveling in South-East Asia after coming to this world, China was in an extreme state of chaos. It was a time when the empire had collapsed, Japan was invading China, and the nation was lying in ruins within the ranks of the Communist Party and the Guomindang. While I was traveling to China in disguise as a British construction attendant, I met him. In a place called Zhangjiajie, I met an ascetic monk starving himself and dying while lamenting the corrupt world."

'He said that he could speak most foreign languages including Korean, so there's a reason why.'

"The mana breathing technique you fundamentally trained for the past month is from something I learned from the ascetic monk, called internal chi meditation. I then reinterpreted it and turned into a mana breathing technique. I was able to understand once I encountered internal chi meditation from the ascetic monk. Why mages had to undergo difficult mana training, and why knights could only use Aura Blade despite possessing a lot of mana. And also, how Summoners could open dimensions and summon spirits with their weak mana."

This magic lesson couldn't be compared to a normal cramming session. I focused my mind in order to capture every single word.

"The difference lay in the danjeon. What the ascetic monk told me was, all natural energy, or mana, has no form yet still exists. It exists, but it

cannot be said to be an existence— that is the true essence of natural energy. Humans randomly chose that natural energy, stored it in their danjeon, and began the accumulation of chi, or mana accumulation.”

[T/N: Danjeon is the Korean term for dantian, the sea of qi. There are three main centers: the lower, middle, and upper (Wikipedia).]

At my master’s tranquil, friendly explanation, a small flame was ignited in my heart.

‘Have I also become a mage?’

Just one month ago, I had merely been an ordinary student who knew nothing. That person was now training in unknown magic, which hadn’t existed in the world before.

“Desiring great physical strength, knights are instinctively easily corrupted, but they accumulated mana in their lower danjeon, which can produce a big mana field, and through many generations, they found a way to manipulate mana. That is the mana breathing technique of the knights. And for the mages who wished to powerfully draw the strength of nature within set laws rather than physical strength, they accumulated mana not in the lower danjeon, but in the middle danjeon, or around the heart, which could store pure energy. Prioritizing communication with spirits more than mana, the summoners accumulated mana in the upper danjeon, near the crown of the head, where they could most purely feel the energy diffused in nature. This became the differentiating factor between the knights, mages, and summoners.”

‘Mm, so there was such a deep reason.’

No matter how much I learned and learned, there was no end to this magic. It was so fun it made my heart boil.

"By any chance, did the internal chi channeling you learned from the ascetic monk also include the term 'multi-chi channeling?'"

"Huh? How did you know that?"

'Oh whaaat! So that multi-chi channeling I saw in wuxia novels was right?'

I didn't relish reading fantasy or wuxia novels that much, but I loved reading them to cool my mind off once in a while. That imaginary world that I enjoyed on top of my bed while eating a tasty snack— that was a heavenly resting style that only those who knew of it could enjoy. But the fantasy and wuxia that I had regarded as 100% false had gone from being fiction to reality.

"I don't know how you know, but in the tome given to me by the ascetic monk, it was recorded as 'Mystical Multi-Chi Channeling'. It's an amazing mana technique that couldn't be found on the Kallian Continent."

'Really, where's the limit to this Bumdalf master?'

He surprised me every day, but after seeing the hobby lifestyle that my Bumdalf master enjoyed, I was totally amazed.

There were dozens of giant TVs installed in the central hall of the underground tower. The hall was filled to the brim with cutting-edge plasma TVs over 50 inches in size. And on those TVs, broadcasts from almost every nation on the planet were noisily blaring out in their native languages. Master Bumdalf enjoyed his time crying and laughing while watching those broadcasts. As someone who didn't have much talent in languages, it was enough to garner my respect.

"The most pure mana in the world gathers here, where the magic tower is. As you know, over many years of industrialization, the Earth's mana has been severely polluted. That's why, compared to when I first came to the Earth, at least half of the mana has been polluted or lost. Since the Earth's mana was far lower than the Kallian Continent's in quality and quantity to begin with, that pollution has a huge effect on those training in magic. But since you met a good master, you can discard those worries. You just have to believe and follow me; your master."

There it was, a dramatic phrase that a man used to coax a woman. Master Bumdalf stroked his white beard while spitting out a cliché phrase like 'just believe and follow me.' He was wearing an expression like that of a kindergartener who was starved for praise.

'Should I cry or should I laugh? Goodness!'

"Once my master, always my master! With all my sincerity, I shall treasure master's grace deep in my heart!"

I put a lot of emphasis on 'treasure'.

Who would have thought that I would've become a mage? Around now,

I should have been living a dreamy school life while making lovey dovey eye contact with Seo Ye-rin, who I had just started to talk to. Bumdalf, an unwelcome guest, had appeared in such a time of my life. I had wanted to imprison him on charges of abduction, but after more than a month, I had become quite fond of him.

Bumdalf master had the slight look of a grandpa who lived encrusted to his home while farming in the countryside. Every so often, he showed a look of indescribable longing. Sometimes, I could feel an unknowable longing and loneliness in master Bumdalf's golden eyes.

"If you feel that way, then I can't sit around as your master. Yes, today I opened a new hunting ground just for you. You should look forward to it. Huhuhu..."

'Ah, of course. Dammit, that look of longing is...'

The sicko master was happily spitting out a wicked laugh that didn't match his age.

I resented my purity, which had led me to misjudge the man for just a moment.

'My family discipline is to blame for all this!'

My family discipline, which had absolutely no connection to our house tradition of 'truth.' It was the main culprit responsible for a soul as pure as mine being brought into this world.

Birth of a Great Disciple

Birth of a Great Disciple

Squeeaal! SQUEAAAAAAL!

"Mommy!"

Thu-thu-thu-thu-thump!

This is when one would use the saying, 'always be modest.'

I had been quite encouraged by my master's honeyed praise, that no one in the history of magic had risen to the 2nd Circle this fast before. But upon experiencing the bitter hell that started after I got dropped off in a rather thick forest, I started crying. As my tears flowed, I was able to realize the sage's words of fuuuck.

There weren't any rabbits I could catch with magic here. Time had passed so I was hungry, and for a moment I had lost my sanity.

'I'm a crazy bastard! Graaah!'

I could feel an immense bloodlust from behind me. It was a slight exaggeration, but there was a boar the size of a bull running towards me like crazy, with its hide slightly roasted by my Fire Ball magic.

There was no use to being a 2nd Circle Mage. I was made to feel with my entire body that circle awakenings and mana levels were not proportionate.

'Ah, not even a dagger but a club! Gaaah!'

Even as I ran like crazy, I tasted the feeling of being driven to insanity as I looked at the wooden club in my hand. Being a Taekwondo fourth-degree blackbelt or a Kumdo 3-dan was no use. With such a miserable weapon, the jet-black boar and its quivering bacon were the essence of horror.

'I'll die like this!'

This full-course wilderness adventure, which I was experiencing for the first time in my life! Realizing that I was really going to die by getting hoofstomped by a boar, I looked for a way to survive.

'I'm saved!'

Just then, perhaps by the grace of the mountain god, a huge boulder appeared in my view.

Juuump!

I kicked the ground forcefully and flung my body on top of the boulder.

Crash!

"Geh!"

At the same time that I jumped, the boar that had almost caught up to me crashed into the boulder due to inertia.

'A-amazing!'

I felt an incredible vibration under my feet. If I had been rammed by that boar it would have been difficult to even find a shoe in the carnage.

SQUEAL! SQUEAL! SQUEAAAAAAL!

The valiant Mr. Boar was perfectly fine even after ramming into the rock. It was glaring at me with brown, bloodshot eyes as I shivered all over, atop the rock.

Just like I had thought of the bastard as meat, I was definitely a meal in its eyes.

'Isn't this too much? What kind of 2nd Circle magic is this?'

There were three parts to magic: mana, will, and manifestation. Having trained all three parts perfectly for the 2nd Circle magic Fire Ball, I realized that something was wrong. Master had said that 2nd Circle magic was the beginning of a so-called magician's training. But my perfectly cast Fire Ball wasn't enough to blacken the boar's sturdy hide and bristles.

‘For my current 2nd Circle mana level, even if I can’t kill that boar, it should have made that pig uncomfortable for at least 8 weeks. But since it got only 2nd degree burns... argh! What in the world is Master hiding from me! Gaaah!’

The answer was clear.

It was definitely the limitations of that short-term magic circle which used Chinese-made crystals, and had started with an insufficient foundation.

Flop.

SQUEAL! SQUEAL!

‘Have- have you ever seen such a shitty bastard!’

While I had briefly been in thought, the boar had laid down on its belly under the 2 meter boulder. It was strongly radiating the fervent intent to gnaw and chomp on my bones.

‘I have to find a way, a way!’

After a month of harsh training, all that was left of me were muscles and bones, so my state of nutrition couldn’t even be compared to the boar’s stored fat reserves. I had an ominous feeling that I would go crazy from the hunger in a day and fling myself at the boar.

‘Wait, now that I think of it...’

Before dropping me off here, Master had lightly mentioned something. That there was nothing you could do about the size of your mana field, it was limited to what you were destined to have.

‘Even if I’m up to the 2nd Circle, I still don’t have enough mana. Moreover, I’m also simultaneously accumulating mana in the lower, middle, and upper danjeons that are collectively called the mana field, so of course the mana level I can show is pretty low.’

Also, Master had said I had completed the 2nd Circle, but he hadn’t told me exactly how much the 2nd Circle mana level was.

‘That evil, pathetic, petty, sicko, old fart Bumdalf!’

A stream of curses noisily spewed out within me.

‘It was called multi-chi channeling, right?’

I had memorized Master’s mana channeling method while stuck on a Mana Accumulation magic circle. I suddenly recalled the multi-chi channeling mantra that Master had carefully translated to Korean, and had explained to me in detail.

“If I can channel the diffused mana collecting in my mana field, then... that grilled pork bastard will...”

That bull-sized boar had tested the human Kang Hyuk's willpower. With my willpower blazing fiercely, I closed my eyes.

'Just wait a bit. I'll definitely turn you into a roast.'

My anger subsided as I sat down crosslegged.

'One became two, and it was called yin and yang, and the five elements that compose the world matured within that yin and yang. each of the five elements became distinct from one another, and...'

As I recited the mantra in my head, my breath stilled on its own, and my breathing became infused with the energy of Mother Nature—I was mana breathing.

Unbelievably enough, Master had drawn mana into the channels in my body with magic. I now filled that channel with the energy of my breathing as I opened it.

This was all to give that boar, who reminded me of my malicious master, a trip to heaven.

I, Kang Hyuk, was such a man.

When being petty, I was incredibly petty. But when I was being generous, my heart was greater than the Pacific Ocean. I was a reckless child capable of both a devil and an angel.

That was me.

* * *

"Huuh..."

Witnessing something that was difficult to believe, despite seeing it with his own eyes, Aidal forgot he was under invisibility magic and exclaimed out loud.

It was a very strange feeling to watch a rare genius who easily grasped multiple concepts just by getting taught one thing. At one point in his life, Aidal had been known as the greatest magic genius on the Kallian Continent. He had never expected to find a genius far more outstanding than even himself in this world. Though it was true that Kang Hyuk's murky body energy had been cleansed by a magic circle's mana, it was impossible for the boy to be so outstanding with that alone.

'That guy... from birth, he has been a child of mana.'

The grand magic Mana Clear, which could only be used by a Mage of the 7th Circle or greater. Those who received the magic would be cleansed of muddled body energy and would gain a body and mana field that could hold pure mana. And as a bonus, thanks to the cleansing of the body, your wisdom would grow, allowing you to live a smooth and easy road as a Mage.

But no matter how important the disciple, Mages did not carelessly

cast this magic. The grand magic Mana Clear did not use mana from nature, but with the recipient's own mana, and was impossible to use otherwise. So quite a lot of mana would be lost. In the worst case scenario, the recipient's circle could even collapse.

Aidal had used that grand magic on Kang Hyuk for a whole month as he slept.

'If it's you, you'll be able to do it. Don't lose your willpower. Kang Hyuk, my disciple. There's not much time left now.'

Kallian Continent, which he wanted to go to but couldn't.

Even before meeting the ascetic monk, Aidan had wandered the world like crazy in order to return to the Kallian Continent. The Dimensional Travel magic circle consumed an immense amount of pure mana. Therefore, he had gone to place after place, seeking a location where pure mana gathered.

While bearing his immense pain and begging forgiveness from the gods, he realized something after hearing a single sentence from the dying ascetic monk.

Life and death have no boundaries. That no matter where you are, nothing will change.

There was no way the Kallian Continent would welcome him back anyways, and there wasn't anything left for him to do there. Therefore, the Earth, which he had suffered to travel through on foot, felt like home

to him.

But he absolutely wanted to get his revenge on those who had made a fool out of him. No, as a Mage, it was far too regrettable to let his magic die out. He wanted to go to the Kallian Continent and let each and every person know of the enlightenment he had gained. He would do that through his disciple, the disciple of the Golden-Eyed Reaper Aidal who had challenged the 9th Circle that no one except the dragon had been allowed in all of history.

That's why Aidal completed the Dimensional Travel magic circle.

And through a method only he knew, he worked on creating a new method of dimensional travel. In the meantime, he set up an illusion barrier in the Golden Lane, which felt like the Kallian Continent, and fished for a disciple to do the hard work for him.

'I wonder if that guy is doing well. That blockhead!'

Actually, Kang Hyuk wasn't his first disciple. About 20 years ago, there was one other guy who had happened to break through the barrier and meet him. But that bastard was close-minded and wicked. Lusting for his master's fortune while learning magic, the bastard had tried to murder him. Aidal had wanted to burn him to death with a Fire Ball, but he had been unable to kill him since the bastard had fallen to his knees and bashed his forehead on the ground in a kowtow while begging Aidal to spare his life. The fact that he was the first disciple Aidal had gotten on the Earth made him weak. He had only learned up to 3rd Circle attack magic anyways, so he wasn't much of a danger.

‘Kang Hyuk, you’ll be able to do it. I, your master, only learned the theory for that mana breathing technique, but you’ll definitely be able to make it happen. The merging of your mana field!’

He was old, but Aidal was a Mage to the very marrow of his bones. By researching the internal chi channeling left to him by the ascetic monk, Aidal had conceived a new mana breathing technique.

However, Aidal wasn’t able to use it. Because he was already an 8th Circle Mage, his mana field had stationed itself in the middle danjeon and was far more powerful than the other fields. If he forcefully tried to merge his mana fields now, the disparity in power would make all the other mana fields explode.

That’s why the mana breathing technique that Kang Hyuk was training right now was a new method that no one else had tried before.

It was the beginning of a great path that even the legendary dragon had never challenged.

* * *

‘I did it!’

I was mana breathing as comfortably as when my mother had sung a lullaby for me as a child.

With the multi-chi channeling that had been passed down through legend, as the base, the mana channeling had given me a taste of being

one with nature.

And with the strengthening of my will, the mana that had gathered in my lower, middle, and upper danjeons was merged, though weakly.

Snoooooooooore!

Snoooooooooore!

Having trapped me on top of the boulder, the boar had begun a drawn-out siege. It was happily sleeping with its belly carelessly left out in the open.

'Jeez! This boar looked down on a human, the lord of all animals! In the name of Kang Hyuk, I shall punish you!'

As I chanted a sentence fit for a Sailor Moon girl who liked to punish evil in the name of justice, I gathered my mana in the middle danjeon, where the circle was.

"My blazing will, my friend, Mana. My rage is your rage. In my name, rain down the purification of fire!"

I focused my mind and recited the magic incantation with a low voice.

Modified by the mana inside me, and my will, the pure shamanistic mana that was diffused in nature was manifested in the world.

That was how magic was used.

The boar's eyes flashed open. Living while surrounded by nature, animals were sensitive to natural energy. As soon as I drew the nearby mana, the piggy bastard felt something was wrong and opened its eyes. Having enjoyed a nice rest, the boar's fatigue had flown away. Thanks to this bastard I had been stuck wrestling mana for half a day — how pitiful I was.

"Get fried, you piece of crap pig! Fire Ball!"

Woosh.

As soon the incantation of 'Fire Ball' fell from my mouth, I felt the mana that had gathered in my heart vibrating vigorously.

[T/N: As a reminder, the lower danjeon is in the abdomen, middle is in the heart, and upper is near the crown of the head.]

Ba-ba-ba-ba-boom!

As the vibrations stopped, a huge lump of fire somehow appeared above the boar's head.

"Wow!"

Though I was the caster, I was more surprised. It was a huge lump of fire that looked to be a whopping 50 centimeters (~20 inches) in diameter. It

was enough to make the magic that I had cast so far look as shabby as gum stuck on the sidewalk.

Ba-baaaaam!

Fwwwoooooshhh.

SQUEAAAAAAL!

Have I ever seen a boar get hit by lightning under a clear sky? The boar that had futilely dared to target a human as its meal was struck with divine retribution. It ran into the dark forest like a bastard struck by lightning.

Craash!

SQUEAAAAAL~!

And just like that, it rammed into a huge tree, leaving behind it's woeful death throes.

"Puhahahahaha! That's right! This is how it should be!"

Standing atop the boulder and looking at the sky, I burst out with vigorous laughter.

The destructive power of a 2nd Circle magic. Moreover, it was a great

achievement that I had won by merging the little mana I had.

I was a rare genius sent down from the heavens.

"Huh?"

Stagger.

But suddenly, the sky whirled and spun above me.

Trickle.

Something burst out from my nose and trickled down.

'D-damn it...'

My delight was short-lived. Due to the immense fatigue that crashed into my entire body, I lost consciousness right then and there.

'Ah~ my boar...'

The afterimage of the Fire Ball roasted boar barbeque came to my mind, and then—

* * *

Crash!

"Tsk, tsk."

He had thought it might happen, but a problem had indeed occurred. While happily cheering atop the rock Aidal had made through Stone Edge magic, Kang Hyuk had fallen two meters onto the dirt floor and had passed out.

And in that moment, Aidal had canceled his invisibility magic and appeared while clicking his tongue.

"You stupid rascal. To be so happy after forcefully merging mana the size of an Orc's tail. Huhu. How does it feel, the hot taste of mana exhaustion?"

The state of mana exhaustion which you would experience one or two times while living as a Mage. It was a state that occurred when you used mana that exceeded the amount you had. At low circles, it didn't have that much of an effect, but in the upper circles, this condition could induce a mana collapse and kill you.

"Your first experience with it is always that harsh. Heh."

Aidal didn't spare his unconscious, mana exhausted, shivering disciple a friendly explanation or advice.

His eyes fell upon the boar, which was steaming as it cooked.

"That looks quite tasty. Kuku."

* * *

"Th-that meat!"

I was in stabbing pain, as if I had been knocked out by someone's club. But even while half asleep within that pain, a fragrant smell burrowed into my nose, stimulating amylase and maltase secretion and waking me up.

That sweet and rich smell, which could wake the dead.

The very first thing I saw upon opening my eyes was the ceiling of the room I was living in and a large, plump piece of meat.

Om nom.

Without even answering my cry, the person called my master was munching noisily as he ripped into a hind leg.

'No matter how you look at it, that's the smell of pork. Ah~ it's definitely the charcoal grilled pork that I had long ago.'

The fact that my nose couldn't be deceived, when even a dog's could was a well-known fact amongst the members of my household. With my hunting dog level sense of smell, I was able to precisely judge the meat.

'The saying that the disciple reaps and the master sows fits this situation perfectly.'

The great magical achievement I had risked my life to produce was being eaten all alone by Master Bumdalf. Without permission, he was monopolizing and abusing the meat I had caught.

"Ma-master, does that meat happen to be the meat that I'm thinking of?"

"Munch! Oh? Nomnom! I dunno. Perhaps because the gods knew my body lacked energy these days, a boar roast was presented before me, can you believe it? I was so moved, my eyes were filled with tears, just like when I was fifteen and saw the panties of the female Mage I liked."

Even when making a comparison, this Master Bumdalf used vulgar analogies that seriously lowered the value of a person.

True to his name, Bumdalf, he was at the height of indecency.

"Did that boar not have any traces of having been hit by a Fire Ball, by any chance?"

"A Fire Ball? I dunno about such a thing. Only that when I saw it, it had roasted to perfection. Kyaa! I've never seen such a tasty fellow! How could the meat be this tender, it's killer with sorghum wine, absolutely killer."

Driiiip.

Without knowing it, saliva dripped from my mouth.

By my estimation, I had starved for at least a day. No matter what, I had to claim ownership of this boar meat and overcome this crisis.

“Master, it is presumptuous of me to say so, but that boar meat is certainly the one I caught with my Fire Ball. Please stop eating now and cede it to your disciple— this one humbly tells you that this is the best way to prevent the relationship between a master and his disciple from souring.”

I mixed in respectful words as I claimed what was mine.

“Have you got any proof? Really, and you say you made a Fire Ball? You’re saying some funny things. Don’t say such things that would make an Orc kick you in the side with its short legs and just courteously beg for a piece if you’re hungry. A man shouldn’t lie in front of such fresh food.”

As expected, I was strongly rebutted by my master.

How much he must have eaten while I was asleep for that bull-sized boar to be reduced to the size of a dog!

‘I know you did it! You scrupulous old fart!’

“Then, if your disciple makes a Fire Ball, then will you believe that my

words are the truth?"

"Fire Ball? Alright, if you make a Fire Ball, I'll believe you."

'Kuhahaha! I'll show you. The magic skill of this genius!'

I was hungry, but with the hope of eating meat, I stood up vigorously.

"My blazing will, my friend, Mana, my rage is your rage. In my name, rain down the purification of fire!"

I concentrated my will drop by drop and roused my mana.

'Huh? Ah!'

But contrary to my intent, my mana didn't move.

Bam!

"Ow!"

Instead, my master's rocklike fist fell upon me.

"Yeesh, you lying bastard. For a person from the courteous country of the East to try and deceive his master because of some meat. Eat up. It's the meat you wanted."

When he finished talking, a hind leg that clearly had Master's teeth marks in it appeared before my eyes.

'Giving such ragged meat to me, who wants to live like a panther dominating Mt. Kilimanjaro no matter how hungry I am—!'

"Thank you for the meal."

Contrary to my thoughts, my hands had somehow rapidly moved to receive the meat, and an emotional smile appeared on my lips.

"That's right, that's how you should be. In the future, live kindly without lies like that. Being hungry isn't a sin."

"Master's words, I shall definitely be sure to keep them in mind."

After laying down some stern discipline, Master turned around and left the room.

'Argh, how can I live my life without having to eat bread soaked in tears! One day, I will get back at that master who is arm in arm with the devil!'

My desire to win blazed furiously. On this foreign land far from home, I was able to experience with my whole body the pain of those without power or support.

Munch.

And, I dug into the little boar meat that Master Bumdalf had left.

‘Yummy!’

I held back my surging tears as I enjoyed the boar meat’s hazy taste. It was just like an illusion— even if you were to die while eating it, you wouldn’t know.

Nom nom.

‘Is there any alcohol left?’

Having stooped so low, I vigorously justified myself.

Meat was meat, and servility was servility— that was all.

* * *

“Y-you’re sending me off?”

I had to confirm Master’s unbelievable words.

“That’s right. You’re not progressing at all, and I see that teaching a blockhead like you is hard at this old age.”

'Should I believe this? Is he gonna tell me he's helping me and then get me employed on a deep-sea fishing ship or something?'

A life that you lived while believing in others was beautiful, but since he had scammed me so many times, my doubt came before my belief.

"Ack! Master, thank you. Actually, I did not tell you, but I was born onto this world with the tremendously important responsibility of carrying on the family line, as the eldest son of the Kang family's 45th generation. Though I am fine with anything, the anxiety my parents and grandpa will feel concerning the continuation of the family line upon losing me will be considerable. If Master could possibly send me home, my bones shall become dust and that dust will fly off to all parts of the world— such will be the extent of my everlasting gratitude to you."

I would be the world's greatest fool if I missed this chance. As I had already experienced, master Bumdalf was fickle and his mind could change at any time. This was no time to be worrying about pride or anything like that. I just wanted to return to the embrace of Korea, the home I longed for.

"Why does it feel like you're implying that I imprisoned you while repressing, exploiting, and coercing you? Surely you're not resenting me even after justly receiving a custom-made present?"

It was a dangerous moment. If I soured this sicko master's feelings, then I'd be at risk of getting dropped off on an uninhabited island.

The situation became urgent.

"In the East, there's a famous saying that the master is no different from a parent. Although that wasn't so at first, having formed a master and disciple relationship with you, I shall hold dear feelings about Master, who showed me the kindness of a parent. This humble human, Kang Hyuk, is not one so shameless as to not know of his master's grace."

I even pulled out dramatic words that were so far from my true thoughts that they made my insides bleed all over.

"Of course that's how it should be. The heaven and the earth know how hard I worked for your sake."

The essence of fraud, which far surpassed my acting! He was capable of lowering the sacred names of the heaven and earth to the level of a pro-Japanese informant.

[T/N: Lots of bad blood between Koreans and Japanese. We mean no offense; we're just the messengers!]

"Since there's no knowing when we'll meet again after parting, your master has prepared a few presents just for you."

'Huh? Pre-presents?'

Before, I would have jumped to receive them, but because I had a very bad memory about presents, my face hardened like a stone statue.

"What, you don't want them?"

Upon seeing my stiffening expression, Master Bumdalf frowned.

"T-that's not it. How could I not want them? Only, this disciple of yours has done nothing, so always receiving things like this prickles my conscience. Master, can't we just pretend that I received them?"

Never in my life had I, Kang Hyuk, lived while trembling in fear with such servility. When I was in preschool, resentful of my parents' disciplining methods, I had fearlessly run away from home for 5 days and 4 nights with just two Choco Pies and one liter of milk.

That Kang Hyuk became impossibly smaller before Bumdalf. And especially because I had learned magic, I knew very well the weight of the 8th Circle.

"Huhu, there's no need to refuse. All you have to do is receive your master's warm feelings."

I really wanted to refuse those honeyed feelings! I got goosebumps all over and clenched my eyes shut.

"Follow me, my one and only disciple."

"T-to where?"

With a voice as friendly as if he were calling the next door neighbor's dog, Master's beckoning had confirmed that my fears weren't groundless.

"Do you want to come when I'm being nice, or..."

Fwoosh.

At the end of his words, a compressed scarlet Fire Ball the size of a head was terrifyingly manifested by his will alone.

"Let us be off, then. This humble disciple has been trembling in anticipation of the present infused with Master's sincere feelings, from the very beginning."

Since I was sure he wouldn't kill me anyway, I clenched my eyes shut.

In such a situation, I knew I would only get hit if I resisted. If I was going to die, then it was probably a wise choice to die without getting hit.

* * *

'Geh! What, what is this?'

Closing my eyes as tightly as if I were being taken to the slaughterhouse, I followed Master to the lowest floor of the magic tower. Possessing its own generator, the magic tower was fitted with cutting-edge technology, including an elevator.

And then, a huge door opened at Master's command.

Arriving in front of that door, my eyes were assailed by the sight of a enormous disorienting magic circle, and I couldn't close my mouth.

'So many runes and figures I don't know. What in the world is this magic circle?'

Since I wasn't an Upper Circle Mage yet, there wasn't much knowledge I needed to know for magic. I realized that after coming here, for some reason, my mind had become sharper than before. My IQ had exceeded 150 before, but I felt that my brain had gained even more lucid processing power.

"Now, what do you think about this present of mine?"

"Huh? Pr-present?"

Master proudly called the magic circle a present.

"You dumbass. If another Mage saw this, they'd be happy enough to lift me to the skies. Tsk tsk, I even have to feed you the meal that I prepared... my goodness."

Master Bumdalf was looking at me as if I were the most woeful person in the world.

'Whaddya want me to do about it?'

The magic knowledge I possessed was incomparably humble. It was like trying to get an elementary student who had just learned arithmetic to figure out differentials and integrals.

"What're you doing instead of going to the center and sitting down?"

"Huh? T-the center?"

It was a 20 meter wide magic circle that shimmered with a golden light that was combined with all seven colors of the rainbow. Master was telling me to go sit in the center of such a circle.

'M-maybe he's gonna...?'

Since I was still a layman when it came to magic circles, I thought that maybe the magic circle in front of my eyes right now was a Dimensional Travel circle.

Bam!

"You idiot! If I sent you off through dimensional travel, you would come out as Orc poop the very next day after your arrival!"

'Orc poop...'

Along with dog poop, Orc dung happened to be the most vulgar of the many varieties of poop.

‘Hmph! Were you an 8th Circle Mage as soon as you were born?’

Master was quick-witted, but I had recently found out that he wasn’t a mind-reader. Even a worm could become a mystical creature, though maybe perhaps not to the level of a dragon, if it lived for two hundred years or so. It was nothing strange for a person to be able to tell what others were thinking after living for two hundred years. That’s why I was relieved and often spoke my mind to him.

“Do you think that you are strong?”

“Huh? I am not strong, but I have enough strength to protect myself.”

It wasn’t a lie— if it wasn’t Master, then no matter where I went, I was confident that I would live without getting trodden upon.

“Is that so? Do you think you’ll be able to win if you fight an elite troop armed with well-maintained weapons?”

“W-what?”

“Are you confident you can take a single blow from a knight who uses Aura Blade?”

‘What is he talking about?’

“ ... ”

"D'you think you can preserve your life while fighting a horde of Orc warriors who possess twice as much physical prowess as robust humans?"

Master Bumdalf was wearing a cold smile that he normally didn't show.

"B-but aren't they foes who don't exist in this world?"

It would honestly be difficult to easily win against the opponents Master had spoken of. In particular, a knight who used aura, a specialized mana force, was far stronger than the current me.

"Then can you block a bullet?"

"What? A, a bullet?"

I had absolutely no clue what he wanted to say. I mean, besides Superman, no one in the world was capable of blocking a bullet with their bare body.

"I can deflect not only bullets, but large cannonballs as well."

'Dayum, he's really an old fart Super Bumdalf.'

From the way he said it, I could tell that it definitely wasn't a lie.

"Just believe in me. As long as it's not a dragon, I'll make it so that

everyone else will call you their elder brother.”

‘Elder brother? I’m not even a gangster or anything... sigh.’

My master’s earnest wish was to get me employed as a gangster. There was no way to rebuff such a stubborn old man.

“By all means, do as you wish.”

Until I was out of here, there was no freedom for me. It was a slight exaggeration, but this was the first time in my life that I longed so much for my country, South Korea, the republic of the free.

‘I’m coming, mom.’

No matter how I thought about it, Master’s magic circle was tremendously dangerous. Master was an immensely intelligent being who had lived for over two hundred years, but the way he acted wasn’t much different from the preschool kids in my neighborhood. And I was the pitiful loser who was getting bullied and robbed of my money by such a preschooler’s violence.

“Um, Master...”

Before I positioned myself in the middle of the magic circle, I earnestly called my master.

“What?”

Master was picking his nose without knowing my feelings of being dragged to the slaughterhouse. He apathetically answered without even dislodging his finger.

"Th-this one doesn't use Chinese-made crystals, right?"

Chinese-made crystals, which had made me decisively hostile to the magic circle's reliability last time!

"Hyuk, let me ask you one thing."

"Yes?"

Master suddenly asked a question.

"Do you think it's possible to live without Chinese-made goods these days?"

"..."

There was nothing more for me to say.

I went to the middle of the magic circle and sighed deeply as I sat down cross-legged.

'Okay, there are sometimes nice Chinese-made goods.'

I tried comforting myself.

But the problem was, those nice goods only appeared by random chance with the same probability of finding a pearl while eating an oyster.

* * *

‘I thought it would take half a year, he’s an amazing kid.’

The totally dejected Kang Hyuk sat on top of the magic circle and assumed the mana channeling position. As he looked at Hyuk, Aidal the Mage was unable to repress his awe.

Actually, even among the genius Mages in the Kallian Continent, it normally took them at least half a year to condense mana and barely reach 1st Circle Magic. If magic was as easy to learn as the sword, then Mages and even dogs and cows would gain the title of Archmage. Working that hard was normal in magic.

But surprisingly enough, in slightly less than two months, Aidal’s new disciple Kang Hyuk had been able reach the 2nd Circle. And he had done so by merging a knight’s mana field, the lower danjeon, a Mage’s mana field, the middle danjeon, and a summoner’s mana field, the upper danjeon.

‘I have to send him when he’s risen to the 3rd Circle and the fusion of his mana has naturally occurred. But there’s no time. If this mana is held

back any longer, it will burst out.'

With a look of regret, Aidal gazed at his disciple, who knew nothing and was channeling. Contrary to the Kallian Continent, Aidal had not been able to find materials for producing high-quality crystals. The result of that was that unlike his calculations, the mana that had been held in the Dimensional Travel magic circle could not stabilize and had begun to activate. As per the Law of Mana Restoration, the instinct of powerful mana was to return to its original state.

'Now everything is up to your luck. I can only pray that the great god Adeine's blessing is upon you.'

Though it wasn't as dangerous as the Dimensional Travel magic circle, this Forced Knowledge Transferral magic circle was also very dangerous.

Though Hyuk's body had been cleansed through the grand magic Mana Clear, getting to the 2nd Circle was the limit for generating circles by forcefully injecting mana. From the 3rd Circle onwards, he would have to gain circles through enlightenments without anyone else's help.

That's why people called magic a study for wise men.

'I will pass on all the magic theories I have comprehended in these past two hundred years to you. After I do so, it's all up to you. Your life will change by as much as you are able to comprehend.'

Once Kang Hyuk was completely absorbed in mana breathing, Aidal opened a side door. The door opened to show a magic circle 3 meters in

diameter.

It was the core magic circle that could impart all the magic knowledge inside Aidal's head using magic.

'Awaken, my disciple! And let the whole world know of Aida's great disciple!'

The wall of the 9th Circle, which he had not been able to achieve.

Aidal wished. He wished for his one and only disciple to become a great Archmage who would surpass him.

"Magic Inheritance!"

A clear magic incantation burst from Aidal's mouth as he closed his eyes.

Ziiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiing!

Countless mana particles slowly poured from the magic circle. Each particle possessing a color of its own, the mana swirled into a whirlpool.

The mana at the magic circle that Kang Hyuk was sitting on also began to dance. The magic was filled with Aidal's earnest wish for Hyuk to become a great Archmage.

Archmage: Volume 1 Chapter 4

This Beautiful Bastard's Love

'An airplane?'

As soon as I opened my eyes, I saw an unfamiliar sight. In a place that looked just like the inside of an airplane, my body was reclined in a plush seat. Stupified by the faint hum of the engine, and the slight turbulence from riding the currents, I returned to consciousness right away.

"Mister Hyuk, did you sleep well?"

"Ack! Wh-who are you?"

I was on a spacious bed-like seat that was immensely plushy. Without even getting a chance to regain my bearings, a strikingly beautiful blonde with long straight hair greeted me amiably, while wearing a stewardess uniform.

"My name is Marisol."

Her bright smile was similar to Jeon Ji-hyun. Even in my surprise, the sight of her skinny legs bore into my eyes.

[T/N: Jeon Ji-hyun is a popular Korean actress and model. Look her up.]

My face flushed.

"We are scheduled to arrive in Incheon International Airport in one hour."

"What? In-incheon International Airport?"

Amidst the woman's friendliness, the words Incheon International Airport soared into my ears.

"Hoho, you have slept for a whole fifteen hours."

"Fifteen hours?"

'What? What in the world happened? Why am I lying here?'

Until my last moment of consciousness, I had been sitting on top of the huge magic circle Master had made. And then countless glimmering lights had penetrated my mind. I only remembered that a mix of unidentified things had burrowed into my mind. I hadn't been able to figure out what they had been, though.

'Wait, am I speaking French right now?'

I was able to converse to some extent in English, but I was still far from speaking French. But the woman named Marisol was definitely speaking in French. And I was skillfully answering her in French, as if nothing were out of the ordinary. It was incredibly natural, as if I had learned French

from birth.

"I have something here that I must relay to Mister Hyuk."

While I was stunned by the unbelievable things that were happening to me in succession, a white envelope was pushed onto me. Sealed with gold leaf, the envelope was light.

'A letter?'

I unsealed it and opened the envelope. A letter appeared as I had expected, but there was also a single platinum card.

'Runes?'

Surprisingly, the letter was written in runes, a language that only Mages could read.

'How am I able to read this?'

While learning 2nd Circle magic, I had acquired about 300 runes. In this language, a single dot changed the meaning and each rune had a meaning of its own, like hanja. From what I heard from Master, at higher circles, you had to learn up to a whopping ten thousand runes.

[T/N: Hanja is the Korean name for Chinese characters. Like kanji.]

Though I possessed outstanding intelligence, even I only knew 300 of them. But now, I was effortlessly able to decipher runes that I hadn't known in the past.

'Did I hit my head or something?'

Maybe this was like what often appeared in movies: a strange twist of fate?

If my head wasn't messed up from being hit, how else would I be able to comprehend French and read runes?

I tried using my imagination to make a guess, but it was all too unbelievable.

Turning my head, I read the letter Master had written.

To my beloved disciple, Hyuk.

'Blech!'

I suddenly felt a surge of nausea from the incredible first sentence.

I feel such regret that the three months I spent together with you are already over. Even as I send you off, this master of yours already longs to see you, the one with whom he shared that brief time.

'Is this old man crazy?'

The lines were oozing with love and almost felt like a proposal. The impulse to rip the letter into pieces raged in my chest.

Having met you thanks to the grace of the Goddess of Fate; Pallan, this master of yours was truly happy. When you later raise a disciple of your own, you too will be sure to understand this tingly pleasure that I'd never before known, in my two hundred years of life.

'This... sick old fart!'

Even if I couldn't see him, I could just imagine Master Bumdalf's evil face. Thoughts of Master; a man immune to laws or strength, got me so heated up that I'd need to grind on a few chunks of ice before I'd be able to rest easily.

Hyuk. Unfortunately, God will not permit our eternal love. I wanted to make you into a mighty Mage over ten or twenty years, but the wheel of fate has decreed that you and I will be separated like this.

My hands trembled.

'Saying something like eternal love to me, a pure, virgin soul! Graaah! This perverted sea anemone, this Orc cousin Mage Bumdalf! GAAAAHH!'

[T/N: Sea anemones = tentacles = perverts.]

I couldn't scream because Marisol was radiating a refreshing smile from a distance away. But if I were to shout, this airplane would explode. My hostility towards Master was even greater than that time in my childhood

when the neighbour's mongrel had bitten me, making it my bitter enemy.

Separated from you by the will of God, I write this letter while enduring the pain.

Hyuk, my beloved disciple. While bearing the cruel capriciousness of fate, this master of yours has left you a few presents. The card you are holding in your hand right now is the only one of its kind in the world, an unlimited withdrawal card. At any bank, if you present this card, you will be able to withdraw as much money as you want.

'Geh! Un-unlimited withdrawal?'

An unlimited withdrawal card, which I had only heard of! Moreover, it was a ridiculous card that could be used at any bank in the world.

'Master, what in the world are you?'

I had known that he was rich, but I hadn't known that he was so insanely loaded.

And the personal plane you're riding right now is the promised present I'd prepared for you. Use it as you wish, if there's anywhere you want to go, use it any time.

'E-even this airplane? Woah!'

It was an immense gift from my master, someone who exceeded all

imagination.

Suddenly, a warm breeze blew over my Siberian tundra-like feelings of hatred and loathing towards Master.

‘That’s right, Master isn’t that bad of a person. How lonely must he have been in these two hundred years, for him to have kidnapped and forced a person like me into becoming his apprentice. It was only a crappy three months, that’s all.’

Our family motto of ‘truth’ was written on a wooden board, and 128 specific rules were written all over the back of that board, so that only members of the family could see them. They were rules of ‘truth’ that you could only see once you were an adult.

Not long ago, when my parents had been away, I was dusting our proud family motto and discovered it.

One of the rules popped into my head.

‘Those who reject what is free, are hypocrites who are betraying their true feelings. Those who look at the free item and feel love for the giver deep in their hearts rather than rejecting it are the ones who possess true and honest feelings— they are the descendents of the Kang Family.’

There was also, ‘Look at women as if they were gold,’ ‘Covet thy neighbor’s possessions as much as possible,’ ‘Flattery is a necessity for success, so use it truthfully,’ among others.

These bits of wisdom that one had to learn while living life were all engraved behind the single word, 'truth.'

And I was a truthful man.

This generous heart of mine, which was forgiving the master who had committed a permanent sin. Even an angel would kneel at the sight of me, and request a teaching from me.

One last thing. No matter what happens in the future, do not blame or resent this master of yours.

Everything that happens is simply your master's deep love for you.

"Yes, sir!"

If Master had been by my side, I could have even forgotten the misunderstandings that had accumulated so far, and embraced him warmly.

The human Kang Hyuk was not such a petty Korean man.

'The next time I see him, I should ask him to give me his inheritance inventory. It's an upright Mage's custom for the sole disciple to take responsibility for the treasures left behind by the master!'

"Kuhuhuhuhu..."

I tried holding it back, but laughter slipped past my lips and trickled out.

There was no one else in the world who owned a personal airplane at this age, as well as an unlimited withdrawal card.

‘So my dream is becoming reality at last! My eternal desire; paradise!’

The utopia of paradise that appeared in myths had been my dream ever since I was young. The gluttoned and plush Shangri-la, where I would live with those I loved.

In this day and age, if you had money, nothing was impossible.

Just then, I strongly felt that the goddess from the other world, the Goddess of Fate; Pallan was on my side.

‘I should raise a glass in her name sometime. Kuku.’

I lay comfortably in my seat while engraving the last of Master’s love deep into my soul.

“Lady Marisol.”

“Yes, Mister Hyuk.”

At my call, the golden-haired beauty approached, a smile blossoming

on her lips like a blooming marigold. I involuntarily gulped at the sight of her.

“Haha! As it turns out, this airplane is mine. But what are its specs? Seeing as it’s quite big, it seems worth using.”

It wasn’t just at the level of being ‘worth using.’ Though I didn’t know what kind of leather they were made of, the brown seats inside the airplane were immensely soft. I could also see that the plane was filled with cutting-edge equipment and had luxurious interior design. Far away, I could even see huge sofas and a bar where you could drink alcohol, so it didn’t seem like the plane was small at all.

“It is an A380 specially manufactured by Airbus.”

Marisol nonchalantly stated the name of the airplane while smiling broadly.

“Cough! Cough, cough!”

The cold fresh juice that Marisol had handed me caught in my throat, just like that.

‘A- A380! That terrifying jumbo airliner that can seat a maximum of 800 people?’

A unique method of transportation created by humans, a single one cost \$400 million.

My jaw dropped and I blankly thought of Master.

‘Ma-master!’

This beautiful bastard’s love came surging deep into my heart. Somehow, it seemed like I had come to truly love Master.

* * *

“An A380 is suddenly landing? It hasn’t formally landed in our airport before, so what airline is it?”

“I don’t know, I heard it wasn’t an airline, but a personal plane.”

“W-what? An A380 as a personal plane?”

In the control tower at the gateway at the South Korean Incheon International airport, the staff were kicked into a flurry of commotion due to the A380 that had suddenly flown in.

Not long ago, Airbus’ next generation airliner had landed once in Incheon Airport for a test flight. Capable of carrying up to 800 passengers and flying nonstop around the world, the airliner that was called a moving five star hotel was currently making an unscheduled landing.

But they had been informed that the plane was for personal use.

The VIP airport passage that only high-ranking public dignitaries like presidents, foreign generals, or chiefs of the Constitutional Court were permitted to use was reserved in advance.

"It's here!"

Ruuuummmble.

The ten women of the Airport's courtesy team in charge of the VIP lounge were stiff with tension, watching the huge airplane moving down Runway 9. They were truly curious about the identity of the person who was arriving in a \$400 million personal plane while getting VIP treatment.

Thump, thump.

The airplane was moored and the sound of an unknown person's footsteps slowly drew closer. As the sound of the footsteps grew near, the dolled-up women in the courtesy team were able to lay their curious eyes on the man who slowly appeared.

"Ah!"

"Oh my!"

Though they knew it was certainly a gaffe, low cries burst out from their lips.

"Haha! Hello there!"

Having imagined that it would be Arabian royalty rotting in piles of money, or at least a famous foreign celebrity, the courtesy team felt themselves freeze the moment they saw the robust Korean-speaking young man. Or rather, the student who still showed signs of being a child.

A high school student whose face they could now clearly see was getting off after riding the giant airliner, the A370 which even the wealthiest Korean couldn't use as a personal plane.

"W-welcome."

Wearing frozen business faces, the courtesy team lightly bowed their heads towards the student who was raising his hand and smiling broadly as if something very good had happened.

The male student's flustered voice rang loudly above their heads. "Where do I go for the Customs Inspection?"

As if he didn't even know how to use the VIP lounge, the clumsy high schooler was scratching his head.

The faces of the bowing staff members went slightly stiff with shock.

* * *

Ch-ch-ch-ch-ch-ch-chunk.

'It, it was real!'

Having kindly reissued my passport, Master Bumdalf had made it so that I could safely return to Korea again. I had come out of the flashy and elegant VIP lounge, which I was seeing for the first time in my life, but I actually didn't have a personal car. As such, surrounded by the courtesy team that followed me even outside the lounge, I went to an ATM.

And then, the withdrawal.

'That 0 was THE 0?'

The card's password was 1111, a number befitting my simple master, and as soon as I put in the card, I saw the unlimited number, 0. At first I thought it was a fake card that didn't have any money. But once I made a withdrawal, a hundred or so ten dollar bills came spewing out without a single hitch.

My jaws dropped at the sight of the lump sum, an amount I had never held before in my life.

'YESSSSSSSSS! Kuhahahaha!'

With the realization of the dream I had imagined, my heart was pounding so much I thought it would burst.

Wearing the brand-name jeans and white shirt that Marisol had

prepared for me, I was also decked out in some fitting sunglasses and several accessories. I was directly able to get a taste of the luxury life I had only heard of.

‘Let’s go! To home!’

Before I knew it, the seasons had changed to the end of summer. While under the cool, air conditioned breeze, I grandly walked out of the airport.

And then, the blinding August sunlight.

The rays of hope that signalled the end of suffering and the beginning of happiness were energetically shining on me.

* * *

‘Surely they haven’t sold my family register because I died or something, right?’

I had arrived at my house via a limousine taxi. I was curious about how my parents, who raised their son as if playing a safari wilderness simulation game, had fared while I was gone. I was truly curious about whether they had flown all the way to the Czech Republic in tears because their one and only son had disappeared, or if they were comfortably living their daily lives while believing that I was alive and would return.

‘Hmm...’

Thanks to my well-off father and mother, we were living in a fairly nice apartment in the Gangnam District.

[T/N: Gangnam is a district in Seoul. It's known for stinkin' rich folks who want to send their kids to really nice schools.]

Apt 707

The current date and time was Saturday, 5 pm. My parents would be home at this time.

Ding dong.

Taking a deep breath, I pressed the doorbell, but I didn't hear any response.

'Did they go somewhere?'

They weren't the kind of parents who would throw away their lives because their son was gone.

'I don't even have a key.'

The door was double locked with an electronic lock and a key.

"Who is it?"

Just then, I heard my mom's voice from within— though it was a familiar sound, it didn't have any energy in it.

'Mom...'

Suddenly, a part of my chest tightened. Their son had quickly grown up while eating, sleeping, and pissing well. From the voice I heard, I was able to grasp how difficult this time had been for them because of me; the son they had lost while on a school field trip.

"Who's this?"

Following my mother, I heard my father's heavy voice.

'They should be able to see everything through the front door camera, so what are they doing?'

"Hyuk!"

And shortly afterwards, having seen me through the front door camera as I had expected, I heard my mom's agitated surprise from the speaker.

"I'm home!"

With a voice that was as energetic as ever, I announced that I was home; it was something I said whenever I came back from school.

The door opened with a click.

"Haha! Father! Mother! This son of yours has returned!"

Thinking that my parents might possibly be worried, I went inside as if nothing were wrong.

"..."

My parents were dazedly standing in the entryway. They were blankly staring at me with faces of disbelief.

'Tch, why have they grown so old?'

The several wrinkles that had lined my mom's eyes in the few months that I hadn't seen them, and the grayish white hairs on my father's head were glaringly obvious. My heart stung as something hot swelled in my eyes.

"Son, you're late? Hoho! Was the field trip fun?"

"Huh? Yes! It was a very, very valuable trip."

My mother called me her son like normal as she greeted me.

Brush, brush. My mom tousled my hair, which had grown longer than

hers, with her hand.

"You've grown a lot while you were away, haven't you? What were you doing until now that you couldn't even contact us?"

Though they knew that I had disappeared on the school excursion, they treated me as if I had just gone somewhere far away to play.

"Hehe, I tried running away for the first time in a while. If not for the school field trip, when else could I have tried traveling in Europe?"

"R-ran away?"

I couldn't tell them the truth that I had learned magic under the crazy Archmage Master Bumdalf. If I told them the truth, then they might even send me to a mental hospital.

"I'm joking. I drank something that a strange grandpa gave me in the Golden Lane. And when I opened my eyes, I was in some village in the European countryside. I helped the bad-tempered, kidnapping old man with some work over there before coming back."

"Ah, so that's how it is. So there was worth in your father raising you with a strong hand after all." Father nodded as he said that it was thanks to him.

"Well, that... that's true."

My father had a point. If not for the parent who practiced 101 hidden rules in order to make his son strong, I might have committed suicide under Master Bumdalf's tyranny long ago.

"Son, thank you. For coming back."

My mom hugged me lightly. Rather, she was shedding tears while in my embrace.

'Ah, seriously.'

The stinging in my heart was enough to almost make me shed painful tears. If not for the next thing that my mom spoke into my ear while in my embrace, I would have certainly burst into tears while hugging her.

"Surely you didn't forget to buy mom a present, right?"

"..."

While in the midst of our unexpected, touching, and emotional family reunion, suddenly a gust colder than the air conditioner swept right past my heart.

"Oh! Those sunglasses are nice? Is it a Ferragamo?"

"Oh my, it really is? As expected of our son. No matter how busy he is, he won't forget presents for us. Hoho!"

"Haha! This is all due to raising our child strictly, is it not?"

That was how my brief relationship with the goods that Marisol had given me ended. The whole bundle of gifts that she had passed to me were steadily divvied up in my father and mom's hands.

'Really...'

Like that, I was able to return to my house for the first time in three months.

I had become both the world's greatest millionaire, and a Mage.

* * *

"Lala, lalala..."

Never had I dreamt that coming to school would make me so happy. Thanks to Master Bumdalf, the things I treasured in the world had truly become many.

Squeaak.

"Have a good day, young master."

"Driver Kim, please come so that I'm not late to cram school."

Daehan, the most prestigious private high school in South Korea. In front of the huge gate that was modeled after the Dongnimmun Gate, the well-off children were busy getting out of their cars, as always.

[T/N: The Dongnimmun Gate, also called the Independence Gate, is a huge stone gate in Seoul. Also, most people in Korea go to school by bus or subway, so coming to school in a car is a sign of wealth.]

‘Those brats, for them to go around riding personal cars, they don’t know what wonderful exercise walking is.’

Since I possessed the biggest personal vehicle in the world, I didn’t feel any of my past jealousy concerning coming to school in a personal car.

‘Oh! I’m finally back! School! I, Kang Hyuk, have come!’

I raised my arms like a triumphant general and went through the gates. Since I wasn’t a morning person, at one point in my life, school had been a testing ground of my endurance.

“Oh! That guy, isn’t that him?”

“Yeah. That’s the 1st year who appeared in the school newspaper.”

“During class, Ms. Wang was saying that. Y’know, that one of her students might be getting dragged around by a crazy gypsy and begging on the European streets...”

"Goodness!"

Having grown sharper with the accumulation of mana, my ears picked up the girls' gossip. My body went stiff while still positioned with my arms raised.

'Da-damn it! Gypsy? Begging?'

The day after my arrival home and the warm yet cold family reunion, I had gone to the school with my parents. There, I had told the Principal, who hastened to hear my explanation, as well as Ms. Wang what I'd told my parents. The sad and tragic story about how I'd consumed a free drink, given to me by an old man, and how I'd been dragged around.

But for some reason, the story of my life's troubling ordeal had degenerated into begging.

'Why the hell is it such a vulgar thing like begging! Argh!'

My despicable homeroom teacher, who had thanked me for coming back while even crying at the time. My heart had tightened at the thought that there was still goodness in this heartless world.

But what had returned was betrayal.

'Ms. Wang, to think that you dared to stab a dagger into my heart.'

Ms. Wang was a 35 year old spinster who taught English. Because she

was a female teacher who always lamented about being an old maid that couldn't get married, she was called the Dreaded Snow White. With that dreaded mouth of hers that made millions cringe, she had turned me into a pitiful and shabby beggar boy.

'I won't let this slide. Some day, I will have my revenge...'

I swore vengeance with a blazing heart. For the sin of having carelessly opened her mouth, and also for spreading false information, I would make her shit blood while feeling the volcanic rage of Kang Hyuk, the magic genius.

'Eh, but why did the recipe for the magic reagent that makes you shit blood pop into my head just now?'

After getting freed from Master Bumdalf's oppression and returning to my house, every night, I trained like crazy in my dreams. Runes and magic spells I hadn't even learned, as well as countless basic magic theories and alchemy, upper circle spells, and so on. If I thought of one thing, I was reminded of associated spells or magic.

'It's because my body doesn't have any energy. I should boil and eat some hundred year old wild ginseng.'

The uses for my overflowing money were endless.

"Kang Hyuk?"

While I was swearing my revenge as I walked to the classroom, I heard a

sweet and gentle voice. My head turned towards the one who had called my name without reserve.

'Seo, Seo Ye-rin!'

The lily flower was wearing a navy blue, checkered uniform skirt. A small blue ribbon necktie was attached to her white blouse. Her beautiful skin, which looked whiter than her blouse, was radiantly blossoming under the morning sun.

"You, you're alive?"

As if seeing me as a dead ghost despite looking at me with her own eyes, Seo Ye-rin asked for confirmation.

"Course I am. I just randomly went on a vacation in Europe for a bit."

Without cowering, I coolly lied about having gone on a vacation in front of Ye-rin.

"That's a relief..."

Seo Ye-rin nodded as she showed eyes of happiness.

'Wut? Is she worrying about me right now?'

I hadn't even seen my parents look at me with such doting eyes before.

The angel Seo Ye-rin had presented me with such a precious gift so early in the morning. If someone just put wings on me, I could fly right into the sky.

"Let's go in. Joong Hyun is really waiting for you, Hyuk."

"Huh? Yeah, okay. We should go in. That rascal, to think that he yearned so dearly for this elder brother of his. Heh, that's why you've got to treat a person well while they're still around."

I walked through the hallway towards the classroom with the grinning Ye-rin.

"Um, Hyuk..."

Just then, the angel cautiously called my name.

'Hnng, she must have been super worried.'

"What?"

I warmly gazed at Ye-rin's red lips as her eyes sparkled. I was filled with boundless anticipation at what kind of happiness those sexy and cute lips would deliver this time.

"Was... begging fun?"

"Geh!"

Ye-rin's finishing blow!

A intense groan rang ruthlessly through my throat.

'Ms, Ms. Wang! I won't forgive you!'

Thus, like Jack and the Beanstalk, the seed of vengeance rapidly grew towards the sky.

* * *

"H-hyuk!"

When I entered the classroom, Joong Hyun sprang up and energetically called my name as if he were a husband calling his wife. At the same time, all the kids in the classroom turned to look at me.

"Hi, everyone!"

[T/N: He says this in English.]

A virulent rumor that I had begged in Europe had circulated, but I was blameless.

'The rascals, why're they surprised.'

Because I had lived my own way without cowering, I was able to grin even while in front of their surprised and confused looks.

"Keke, there was a rumor that you went around begging while getting dragged by a gypsy, but looks like you managed to come back alive."

'Ara? Would you look at that?'

There was a bastard sitting askew on his chair as he enthusiastically yapped me a welcome. It was Hwang Sung-taek, the mega brat who lived on his grandpappy's fortune.

"Haha! Rumors are just rumors. Isn't someone who believes such a ridiculous false rumor just an idiot?"

I laughed stiffly as I sought agreement from everyone else. But not a single person nodded in response to my words. Even Joong Hyun avoided my eyes. Even though he was the blood of my blood and a close enough friend that I would share a black bean bun with him.

'Would you look at these guys? Should I give 'em a taste of Fire Ball magic?'

This misunderstanding could all be quickly resolved with a single spell.

But for some reason, I didn't want to.

Unlike before, my pockets were lined. With the enlargement of my wallet, my generosity had also become as big as the Earth.

"You dickhead, how're you gonna pay for getting us locked up in the hotel until the very last day? If you're an idiot, you should've slept nicely in the car. Why the hell did a penniless bastard like you even go sightseeing, huh?"

Fwoosh! Hwang Sung-taek unleashed a two-part assault that made my insides blaze.

A fiery smile appeared on my quivering lips.

"I do feel sorry about that point. But I don't feel sorry at all to just one person."

I did feel sorry that I had probably ruined their school field trip. It hadn't been intentional, but the result was that it had definitely negatively impacted everyone. But to just one bastard, no to the two faithful mongrels beside him as well, I didn't feel even a whit of remorse.

"Hwang Sung-taek, beware of the sky. Don't get hit by a bolt out of the blue while walking around."

"A bolt out of the blue? Puhahaha! The threat you come up with is lightning? You immature little shit."

Unlike me, Hwang Sung-taek had never given serious thought to unexpected lightning strikes.

'You're dead! This dirty-mouthed bastard.'

As soon as I thought of a bolt out of the blue, the magic spell for Lightning; the ultimate 3rd Circle attack magic, naturally came to mind. I firmly resolved to give him a lightning bolt as my sincere school excursion gift.

"Hoho! Hyuk, you were greeting the kids?"

A woman's awkward laugh came ringing into the classroom, which had gone quiet due to my savage conversation with Hwang Sung-taek.

'Ms. Wang Sun-nyeo!'

Disguised in makeup, Ms. Wang the spinster came in through the open classroom door. Having debased me into a mere beggar, Ms. Wang wore a pretentious smile as she gestured at me as if we were friends.

"I have finished saying my greetings. I will go sit in my seat."

There really wasn't a need to say more.

'Hm? I see. If I control the strength and use Poison magic, she should be able to shit blood.'

As I walked to my seat, twenty-one different ways to make her shit blood happened to pop into my head. I didn't know why that was stored in my mind, but it was certainly very useful knowledge.

Archmage: Volume 1 Chapter 5

Date with Ye-rin

“What is the area between the two curves $y=x^2-3x$ and $y=-x^2+x$?”

‘8/3. Huh? Since when has integration of multiple polynomials been this easy?’

As befitting of the nation’s top high school, the first years had to learn second year math, in class. Math wasn’t hard for me in the first place, but now the formulas were drawn out lickety-split in my mind, and I was able to reach the answer in 1 second.

‘Was I always this smart?’

No matter how much of a genius I was, I shouldn’t be able to solve an integration of multiple polynomials question in 1 second.

‘What in the world is inside my mind?’

It wasn’t just math. During English class, which was taught in English, and in physics, which went considerably into specifics, I was made to discover and be surprised by my own intelligence. I was able to tell that the English teacher’s drawling accent wasn’t the way American white people spoke, but the characteristic accent of black people, and I even discovered some enormous errors in the formulas of my physics textbook.

Then, math had followed the English and physics classes. Unlike the kids who were moving their pens to studiously solve the problem, I had come to the answer in 1 second through mental arithmetic. After solving it, my eyes settled on the teacher who was lovingly gazing at the kids who were solving the problem.

‘What a pretty teacher. Huhuhu.’

Wasn’t it said that forbidden love with a beautiful female teacher was among the romantic fantasies of a man?

Lee Ji-hae; the math teacher possessed the best looks in the school—no, her beauty was on the level of the top celebrities in the nation. Her outfit, a sky-blue blouse over the pencil skirt she liked to wear, refreshed those who saw her. Moreover, her slim fingers holding a piece of chalk and her raised white collar matched all too well with her intelligent face.

‘Kyaa, if only I were just 3 years older.’

If I had been at least a college student, Ms. Lee Ji-hae would have been well worth trying for with my life on the line.

“Hyuk, is the pace okay?”

While I was enjoying some hazy imaginations as I stared at my teacher, Ms. Lee Ji-hae had gotten right in front of me and worriedly asked me a question.

“Of course! Listening to your thoughtful lesson makes every problem no

problem at all. Haha!”

“Hoho! There was a rumor that you had a hard time during the school excursion, but I see that was all a lie.”

Gleaming white teeth were revealed the moment she flashed a smile. The instant she approached, the beguiling fragrance of a woman ignited a fire in my spirit.

“There is a famous saying that the young invite hardship, after all. The recent Europe trip was a fruitful experience that gave me many lessons and gifts.”

“Lessons and gifts? That’s right, there’s something to learn even in times of hardship. Our Hyuk grew a lot while he was away, didn’t he.”

Brush, brush. At the happiness of having found a student to be proud of, Ms. Lee Ji-hae brushed my hair with her slender hands. I thought that if I were to make an appearance on ‘TV is the Vehicle of Love’ later in my life, I would definitely seek Ms. Lee Ji-hae.

[T/N: That’s an actual Korean show that ran from 1993 to 2010 (there’s no official translation for the name). One of the programs was to find someone who was important to you in your past and share your feelings.]

‘But that little shit, why is he glaring so much?’

While I was enjoying Ms. Lee Ji-hae’s soul-calming warm hand, Hwang Sung-taek and his cronies were glowering at me as if something didn’t sit

well with them.

'I oughta trash the brats with Magic Arrow!'

But now wasn't the time. A little later, after I reached the 3rd Circle, I would give them a hot rated R experience that they wouldn't forget for the rest of their lives!

Riiiiiiiiinnngg!

'It's already over.'

With the noisy ringing of the 4th period ending bell, Ms. Lee Ji-hae returned to her lectern.

"Stand! Bow!"

"Thank you very much."

"Alright, have a good lunch."

Leaving behind a loving smile at the very end, the teacher left the room hugging the attendance log and her teaching materials with her delicate arms.

My regrettable crush ended with that.

"Joong Hyun, let's go!"

"Yeah!"

Th-th-thump!

As always, we left the classroom in a hurry. It was the cafeteria of Daehan, a high school with the best facilities, but being late would only leave us standing in line.

'What was the spell for Haste magic, again?'

I thought of Haste magic while running towards the cafeteria, and with the thought, the magic incantation naturally came to mind.

'Mana! I have to hurry and expand my circle!'

Because of the squirming magic knowledge in my head, the still insufficient circle and mana felt like enemies to me.

* * *

"Father, Mother, are you not going on a vacation abroad this year?"

"A vacation? I want to go, but... the stock values are turbulent these days, you see."

"It's such a shame. Why is the stock market like this when I'm on sabbatical, really."

As I ate my mom's spicy and refreshing kimchi stew, I lightly brought up the topic of an overseas vacation.

'I'll be able to train magic without worries only if my parents are away.'

I was in a hurry due to the countless pieces of magic knowledge that popped out pell-mell in my mind. But because of my parents, who frequently opened my door unannounced, coming in to check for wholesome computer use, I couldn't do any magic training.

"Honey, please quit being a fund manager now. You've earned enough up 'till now, and I also have a stable income. So please stop the headache-inducing work and try finding another job."

My mother was as sharp as a knife to her son, but to my father, she was an incredibly kind wife and friend.

"I want to, but... we still have to send Hyuk to college, and..."

"F-father! Haha! Your Kilimanjaro panther has grown up already. Please stop worrying about me and enjoy your life together. There's a saying like this—you who worked hard to raise your child, enjoy your middle years~!"

"Then shall we do that? After looking at only graphs for a year, my body and mind are getting tired."

My father liked to eat and play as much as I did. Our combined encouragement roused his interest.

"Then where shall we go for a vacation this time? Since we traveled around the Americas last year..."

Ever the one to follow her husband's wishes, as soon as my father's words dropped from his mouth, Mother was frighteningly quick to start planning the vacation.

'Ni ~ ice!'

A cheer burst out inside of me. Now, I had to hammer in the nail.

"How about a 6 week cruise? I heard that a luxury 7-star cruise ship touring the entire world, including Europe and Africa, is docking in Busan Harbor soon. Since you're going on a vacation, you might as well make it a memory you won't ever forget. Especially because Father and Mother have maintained the youth and love of 20 year old newly weds, this son of yours is actively recommending this cruise."

If I was going to send them off, then it was best to send them far away, and on an extensive cruise they couldn't just come back from whenever they wanted, at that.

"Oh! Now that you bring it up, going on a cruise is an option, isn't it?"

For now, Mother made a expression of agreement.

"B-but I heard that the cost per person exceeds several thousand dollars... isn't that too excessive for us?"

He was tempted, but because he was aging, the poor, middle-aged head of the lion pride couldn't help but worry.

"Please go! This son of yours will make it happen!"

"What? You will, Hyuk?"

As soon as I said it, my parents were extremely surprised.

They didn't know. That the only unlimited withdrawal card in the world was in the hands of their son, a man as wealthy as an emperor.

"Here are the tickets. I've arranged for a suite in your names. There, you'll be able to see the broad ocean any time you want. The departure date is Saturday of next week."

I pushed the envelope holding the gilded tickets towards them.

"You..."

Having overcome their confusion, my parents were looking at me with serious expressions on their faces.

"Hyuk..."

My father said my name quietly.

'I hope it goes over well.'

My father's call was worrisome. It was reasonable, to be honest. What kind of parent would nonchalantly accept vacation tickets that cost thousands, no, ten thousand dollars, from their fledgling son?

I gulped nervously. If they asked me to be honest about where I had gotten the money, then I wouldn't have anything to say. How could I say that I had become the disciple of a crazy Mage; Bumdalf, who'd come here via dimensional travel, and that I had been gifted with an immense fortune?

But my father's next words dispelled my worries.

"You don't have any pocket money for us?"

'Father...'

I sighed deeply as I looked at our family motto of 'truth,' which was displayed for all to see on the living room wall. I was reminded of one of the additional lines that were related to 'truth.'

'When you take, take it all. And be extremely thankful to the giver. That

is truly a reflection of your true feelings.'

And my parents were all too truthful, even to their one and only son.

"You won the Lotto, right?"

"Since he begged in Europe, might it not be Superbowl or something like that?"

[T/N: Hyuk's mom mistakenly thinks that the Superbowl is a European lottery. Obviously, it is not. Lotto is a South Korean lottery.]

"As expected of our son!"

"Hoho! Hyuk, give us lots."

It was amazing that they could even come up with such things. Even if they were to meet Master Bumdalf, they probably wouldn't even be fazed. They were already busy checking the tickets I had handed over as they cheered happily.

* * *

'Thank you, big sis Marisol.'

The aircraft crew, including big sis Marisol, was staying in Korea just because of me. When I got off the plane, she had given me a business

card, telling me to give her a call anytime if there was anything I needed.

‘Magician Group? That name is so like Master.’

Even Master couldn’t have avoided adjusting to this lawful world. He had told me that his immeasurable assets were cached all over the place in some tax free banks called ‘Archipelago,’ in the name of the Magician Group.

And today, I had gotten word from big sis Marisol that my parents had safely boarded the cruise ship. I also found out that the world’s top luxury cruise ship currently docked in Busan, was merely a part of Master’s overflowing assets.

‘My life was changed in three months. Kukuku. This is totally movie material.’

Besides the fact that I had been to hell and back, in just three months, I’d become one of only two Mages in the world, as well as an unheard of multi-billionaire!

‘Paradise! For that grand goal!’

Dreams existed to become true one day.

I dreamt my own dream. A kingdom just for me, which I would live with the woman I loved while wielding absolute authority, like a medieval king.

That was my dream, and it would definitely come true.

“Shall I try moving around a bit?”

Though I was apart from Master Bumdalf, I didn't neglect my mana channeling for even a single day. Since I had become a Mage, I would become an Archmage at least as great as Master.

‘Enlightenment... what could be the enlightenment that breaks the 3rd Circle wall?’

I sat cross-legged in the middle of the living room and immersed myself in contemplation about 3rd Circle magic. One would only be called a Mage once they reached the 3rd Circle, and at this stage one could use useful magic for daily life, as well as diverse and powerful attack magic. When I thought about the 3rd Circle, all the incantations related to the 3rd Circle naturally popped into my mind.

‘I'll raise my circle first!’

Money was like poison if picked up by those without ambition or ability. Magic incantations were exactly the same to Mages who couldn't raise their circle.

Magic really did exist.

I would become not a Mage of dreams, but a true Mage.

* * *

'Tch, was it a mistake to send them?'

The very next day after deciding to go, my father handed in his resignation letter and the two of them finished preparing for the vacation. They boarded the cruise ship with hardly a word of farewell and went on their vacation.

A week had already passed since then.

'I want to eat the food Mom makes. Hnng.'

Learning magic was good, but food was important to me as well. For the past few days, I had managed thanks to the side dishes my mother had prepared, but I was getting tired of them and wanted to eat my rice with warm soup instead.

'But why doesn't this bracelet come off?'

The silver bracelet that had been Master's bait.

'A link that connects time to time and space to space?'

There was a sentence like that written in ancient runes on the outside.

'Time is time and space is space, but why is it parasitizing my arm?!'

Since it was a foreboding object given to me by Master, I had tried cutting it with a saw and taking it off with soap, but the silver bracelet wouldn't budge, as if it had become a part of my arm. It was extremely worrisome.

'Surely nothing will happen, right? It's just a bracelet.'

When I looked at the bracelet, some kind of figure came to my mind. But the figure was too difficult for me to understand at my level, so I tried to ignore it.

'Tch! It's Saturday but there's no where to go, and that rascal Joong Hyun went on a vacation with his parents!'

Daehan High School's teachers worked hard for five days a week. As a result, Saturday was a rest day, just like Sunday. But the problem was that I had nothing to do besides studying magic, and I had already acquired most of the knowledge related to the 2nd Circle. Because my unexpanded circle was already filled up with mana, I couldn't accumulate any more mana.

'Should I give her a call?'

Yesterday, there was a sudden downpour in the afternoon, even though it was September. Since I hadn't brought an umbrella and didn't have a driver waiting for me outside like the other kids did, I was blankly staring at the falling rain.

As the raindrops splashed onto the school yard, I saw something that I hadn't known of at all before— each trivial raindrop held clear and pure energy.

Like the performance of an immense orchestra, the raindrops were performing with mana.

Pitter, patter, pit-pat.

While looking at the falling rain, the mana inside of me was also joyful and danced about.

Just then, she appeared.

"It's refreshing, right? I like the rain."

The girl endlessly staring at the falling rain by my side with her black eyes was Seo Ye-rin. A clear fragrance that reminded me of yellow autumn chrysanthemums rode the misty air, and burrowed into my nose.

"Once in a while, I like to get rained on, a bit."

Fwoosh!

Without even asking for my opinion, Seo Ye-rin unfurled an umbrella that was as blue as the sky. Even though we were inside the school, she surreally took my arm. Caught up by her bold action, I was able to walk down the school road under the pouring rain. The rain fell on both of our

shoulders at the edge of the umbrella, and I was receiving tons of jealousy from all the kids, at that.

'You're a man, Kang Hyuk! Don't be so desperate for a phone number.'

After walking for a while like that, Ye-rin left her umbrella and cellphone number with me.

010-99xx-1179.

I turned on the cutting-edge cell phone I'd gotten a few days ago and punched in the number Ye-rin had given me.

Riiing, riiing, riiing.

'She's not picking up?'

The tone rang for a long time, but I couldn't hear anyone's voice on the other side.

"Hello..."

Just then, I heard the dreamlike voice of an angel from the other side of the receiver.

"Ye-rin, it's me, Hyuk."

"Mm. Hi, Hyuk."

After telling her my name, Ye-rin replied brightly although it seemed that she had just woken up.

"The weather's good today and all, so do you want to meet up?"

"Hoho. Are you asking for a date?"

'Geh, a date.'

Her question was directed to me; someone who'd never had a date before in his life, thanks to the safari wilderness simulation game.

"The man Kang Hyuk is sincerely asking Seo Ye-rin for a date. You'll accept, right?"

I had a good feeling from Ye-rin's voice.

"... If it's you, Hyuk, then I'll say yes any time."

After a brief silence, I heard her say yes. My heart thumped wildly as it began to race.

'Ohh~!!'

Truly, my life had drastically changed the day I met Master Bumdalf. I

put aside my bursting happiness and made an appointment with her.

"Since it's one o'clock right now, let's meet on Daehangno at three."

[T/N: A famous street in Seoul. Literally means College Street.]

"Daehangno? Okay. I'll see you later."

"Alright, see you later. Come all prettied up."

"Haha, for whose benefit? I'm hanging up, okay?"

Beep, beep, beep.

I had no idea what kind of audacity made me say something like 'come all prettied up' to Ye-rin.

'D-date, a date! That's right, a date!'

I grasped the hung up phone as my deeply moved feelings quaked within my body.

"Wait a sec? Now that I look at it, I don't have anything to wear! Gaaaah!"

For the sake of growing up strong, besides two sets of my uniform, I had no newly purchased clothes. My parents were hyenas who had shown

regret, despite stripping me of a thousand dollars for pocket money while leaving for their cruise vacation. The only “clothes” I had received from such parents after entering high school was my own panther leather-like skin.

‘If the two of them appeared in fairy tales, they would definitely be Nolbu and his wife, who scorned Heungbu.’

[T/N: Very famous Korean folk tale. Look up ‘Heungbu and Nolbu’ on Wikipedia if you’re interested.]

Holding back my tears, I squeezed into some jeans that gave me a wedgie because they were too small now, draped on the cotton t-shirt Father used as pajamas, and ran outside. As for the jeans, the trendy European shirt, and rest of the goods Marisol had prepared on the day I returned, my father had already packed them away with him.

I was on my way to meet the angel Seo Ye-rin. I needed clothes befitting the angel. Today, I would make the angel happy as her knight.

“Please ring this up. This too.”

I chose jeans that were the safest option for a student and a long-sleeved summer shirt that matched the season, late summer. Furthermore, I armed myself with completely new items, from socks to shoes and even underwear.

“C-customer, your total so far comes to... over \$400, but is it alright?”

I was in the Emperor Mall in Apgujeong, which only the most wealthy Koreans could afford to go to. I went into a store I liked and bought myself clothes.

'Do I look so poor?'

Though our material civilization valued the exterior over the interior, the doubtful look the shop lady was giving me, Kang Hyuk, was regrettable.

"Please ring me up."

I was on the way to meet an angel. I didn't have time to be resentful about the world's heartlessness.

"Oh, my! It's a platinum card. Hoho! This is my first time seeing it, too."

Without even any thoughts of ringing me up, the shop lady held up the platinum card I had pushed towards her and made a fuss.

"This is the rumored platinum card?"

"I heard only billionaires and famous actors use it..."

The shop ladies who had gathered at the mention of a platinum card looked at the card and me with fascinated eyes.

'Even though they were ignoring me earlier...'

I pulled my eyes away from the all-too-transparent women.

There were only 30 minutes or so left now. If I got into a taxi, I would get there right on time.

* * *

‘There’s so many people.’

We had chosen the university Marronnier Park as the meeting place of our date. Since it was the weekend, there were as many women who had come out for dates as there were grains of sand in the sea.

‘Huhu, this is a wonderful time.’

Thanks to yesterday’s rain, the heat wave in Seoul had died down. Usually drenched in hot humidity, today, for the first time in a while, the city was smiling brightly. Moreover, women were happily walking down the street holding hands or arm to arm with their boyfriends.

‘What a stunning body! A work of art, an art!’

It wasn’t just that there were women— there were a lot of women. They were all ladies several years older than me, and just starting to bloom. Wearing the currently popular short skirts and cool tops, their figures as they walked with their hips swinging slightly made my heart tremble, as I watched them.

In order to get into Daehan High School, I had never taken a proper look since middle school—I was truly a Seoul bumpkin. For a person like me, this September Saturday afternoon was like a blessing.

It was just like a dream. To the point where I couldn't even remember how long ago the hellish magic training had been, time helped me recover from the painful times that I had spent with Master Bumdalf.

"My!"

"Wow!"

"She's pretty. Maybe she's a celebrity?"

"What killer looks. Hot damn!"

'Celebrity? Who?'

As I was admiring the pretty women and enjoying my time off, I suddenly heard exclamations from some people behind me. An incredible beauty must have appeared, because the men were drooling as they shouted and the women were making noise.

My head also turned. It was enjoyable free eye candy, after all. I would probably regret it if I missed out.

'Oooh! So sexy!'

My gaze turned right onto her slender legs. Though it wasn't as frivolous as the other women's short mini skirts, she was wearing a denim skirt that was still definitely a mini skirt. Below the skirt were snow white, milky legs.

It was enough to make people marvel.

'I don't know who her boyfriend is, but he sure caught a big one.'

Even if her face was just average, that woman was most certainly qualified to receive people's attention.

'Huh?'

While I was in jealousy and awe, that woman's white Nike sneakers approached me.

"Hyuk."

'Geh!'

The beautiful girl wearing a denim mini skirt and a white summer blouse that made her pearly skin shimmer...

That girl was my angel, Ye-rin.

'Dammit! Then that means everyone has been feasting their eyes on Ye-rin!'

Countless males were still dazedly raking their wicked gazes over Ye-rin. Rage suddenly surged within me. After all, who but Buddha would like a thief that coveted his meal?

"The weather today is good. If not for you, Hyuk, I would have been taking a nap. Hoho, thanks. For asking me for a date like this."

After looking up once, the angelic Ye-rin even thanked me for asking for a date.

"If you're thankful, then shall we start by watching a movie?"

"A movie is good! But you've gotta buy me popcorn and a cola too, 'kay?"

"Sure! I shall give you the full service, princess."

'Kuhaha! I get to watch a movie with a girl besides my mom for the first time in my 17 years of life.'

Didn't someone once say that good things happened if you lived for a long time?

Grab.

'Hohshit!'

While I was lost in my happy imagination, I felt slender fingers wrap around my left hand.

Ye-rin had nonchalantly grasped my hand. Just like yesterday, when she had grabbed my arm.

* * *

'Silly.'

Ye-rin felt happy as she gazed at the pure Kang Hyuk, who was surprised just because she had grabbed his hand.

'Guess he doesn't remember me.'

He wasn't as good-looking as Jang Dong-gun or Jo In-sung, but Kang Hyuk had a refreshing face that automatically made you say that he was manly. With a sturdy physique that matched his height, he was already becoming the hot topic among the first year girls.

[T/N: Jang Dong-gun and Jo In-sung are Korean actors. Their faces... give off a manly feel. Kuhuhu!]

They had gotten into the prestigious Daehan High School, but high school was merely a stepping stone for college. Moreover, since everyone was outstandingly skilled, each one was future competition. Because of

that, everyone was always tense as they talked amongst each other. Even their laughter was a pretense, and no one had friends they could really open their hearts to.

But Kang Hyuk was different.

He always had a smile as cool as the blue sky of autumn on his face, as he went about school life with his shoulders straight and proud. Kang Hyuk drew unseen popularity from the mentally drained students.

Furthermore, Kang Hyuk was the savior of Ye-rin's life.

In her second year of middle school, she had studied at cram school until late in the night in order to get into Daehan High School. Though she studied until night fell, she was able to go to cram school without worries because she had a driver to take her home.

But one day, her driver suddenly got into a car accident and Ye-rin was forced to go home alone, late at night.

There wouldn't have been any problem if she had gone by taxi, but she went home on the bus that ran from the cram school.

And then, she ran into three delinquent high schoolers at the playground at the entrance of her neighborhood.

A chilly autumn breeze was blowing, so there were no people walking around late at night. The delinquents dragged Ye-rin to somewhere dark. She had wanted to scream, but she was so filled with horror that she

couldn't say a word. Even now, she couldn't forget the sight of the delinquents who had looked at her lustfully as they dragged her along.

That night, when she was sure to have suffered an injury that could never be washed away, a knight like the ones in the movies appeared.

Wearing the uniform of the neighboring middle school, the male student was just over 5' 6". He met eyes with Ye-rin as she was dragged along like an animal, and in that moment, the boy jumped forward.

There was no warning or anything. He picked up a wooden stick from the street and beat the daylights out of the three delinquents, as if he were beating mere animals.

Then, leaving the high schoolers who were bigger than him with the honest advice to live their lives properly, he had turned to leave.

That was when Ye-rin saw it. By the dim light of the streetlamp, she caught a glimpse of the name tag on the boy's uniform.

The name she saw was Kang Hyuk.

* * *

"That was fun! Hyuk, what's the next course?"

We came out after watching a movie called Rotten, Filthy, Shitty Bastard. It had gotten good reviews for being fun on the Internet. The

movie had been funny throughout and had combined awesome scenes with action to give us a thrilling ride.

After relieving our stress and coming out of the movie theater, it was already almost six o'clock.

"Ye-rin, do you like jazz?"

"Jazz? How did you know, that I like jazz?"

The unique Ye-rin was clearly different from normal kids. I remembered the jazz tunes that had flowed from her MP3 the other day.

"Let's go. There's a place that does live jazz on Daehangno."

"Really? Impressive, Hyuk! But Hyuk, are you maybe..."

"What?"

Having cheered while praising my meticulousness, Ye-rin's doubtful eyes sparkled.

"Are you one of those players I've only heard about?"

"P-player?"

I heard the word 'player' on my first date ever.

"Ye-rin."

"Yeah?"

At my quiet call, the goddess-like girl's large eyes glimmered with playfulness.

"As the one who compelled me to become a player, you're more likely to be one. And..."

I trailed off as I gazed gently at Ye-rin's black eyes.

"For you, and only you, I want to become your player, always."

Tremble.

'That's right, she should be moved. Huhu.'

Words so naughty that they made me want to go into a hardware shop and bang my head on a metal bar came out of my mouth.

"Hyuk..." Her eyes trembling as if she had been touched a hundred times over, Ye-rin called me with trembling lips.

"Yes, Ye-rin."

On some street corner of Daehangno, as the dusk wrapped the city in shadows, Ye-rin called my name warmly.

And I waited for Ye-rin's next words.

"I'm cold."

'GEH!'

"Has winter come so suddenly? Why is it this cold? Hohoho! Hyuk, be careful. You were so corny you almost made me fall over. Hohoho!"

" ... "

'Of course. I'm the idiot for having believed that dating was easier than studying.'

In middle school, in preparation for the upcoming world of love, I had thoroughly studied a \$4 textbook on dating. It was something I always felt, but the truth was, theories and reality were really as different as night and day, and the price of an item showed in its effectiveness.

* * *

"Welcome. Do you have a reservation?"

Though it was located on Daehangno, a street that targeted young

people, the live jazz cafe Prius maintained a dignified air. I had found through the internet that it was a place with jazz performances of the highest caliber.

"I have a reservation under the name Kang Hyuk."

"Please wait a moment. Ah, here you are. You're in the top VIP room. Please follow me."

The cordial waiter guided us to our table.

"Hyuk, isn't this too much?"

Ye-rin's eyes had turned as big as saucers at the words 'VIP room.'

"I spent all my allowance. It's fine as long as you feed me and keep me alive for the next month, Ye-rin."

"Ha, what? Well... you're being cute, so I'll think about it."

She was pouting slightly with her cherry red lips.

'Those lips sure look cute.'

The strange warmth the sight of her lips gave me made me unable to look away.

"The VIP room does not take specific orders. In a short while, we will bring the chef's special course meal."

'Looks like we won't be able to drink even a single glass, though some wine would be perfect.'

We were clearly still youngsters. The waiter didn't even ask about alcoholic drinks and left with a nod.

"Looks like there's a quintet here. Saxophone, drum, contrabass, trumpet, piano. I'm really looking forward to it."

Ye-rin was making an expression filled with expectation as she looked at the instruments on the dimly lit stage. She brushed back her long, glossy black hair with her right hand, as she made an exceedingly expectant expression.

"This place specializes in performing standard pieces in the fusion jazz literature. It'll be pleasant to hear."

"Hyuk, do you have a lot of interest in jazz, too?"

"No, well... a bit."

I stuttered a response to Ye-rin's query. At one point in my life, I hadn't just been interested in it—I had thought about pursuing the path of a musician professionally. Now it was a dream of the past.

"For a car accident to have suddenly happened..."

"It's no good if we don't have the performance..."

"And at the time when all the customers are in, too."

'A car accident?'

We could hear some shocked voices from behind the stage.

"Hyuk, looks like something happened."

Having waited with anticipation for the performers to come onto stage with starry eyes, Ye-rin made an expression of disappointment.

'Argh, my perfect first date is—!'

I wondered if this was the shitty feeling a painter might experience if they drew a woman of unequaled beauty but were stopped before they could draw the eyes.

At this unforeseen situation, my heart fell. Today's main date course, the jazz concert, was about to go down the drain.

'We can't go back like this.'

There must have been some news, because the waiters who had been

serving the customers were running about in confusion. I was struck with the feeling that they would offer us a refund soon.

"Wait a moment."

"You're going somewhere?"

"Yeah. To the bathroom for a bit."

"Alright."

She must have really been looking forward to it, because Ye-rin's pretty face was filled with heavy disappointment.

'For you, Ye-rin, no, for the monumental first date of this man, Kang Hyuk!'

I resolved myself and went towards the person who looked like the manager.

To show her that nothing was impossible on the path walked by the man Kang Hyuk.

* * *

"Sighhh!"

Hyuk, who went to the bathroom, didn't come back even after a long time.

'Even though it's my first date with Hyuk...'

Ye-rin felt pained. This was the event that her prince charming, Hyuk, had prepared for her. The live jazz that she hadn't even thought of had moved her in a way that couldn't be expressed with words.

Even her considerate parents couldn't pay attention to Ye-rin because of work. Moreover, it was her birthday today. Her father managed a small business, and something must have happened because he hadn't come home for the past few days and practically lived in his office. And her mom was busy lamenting her woes to her relatives and friends on the phone. Ye-rin didn't know the details, but from what she could gather, something bad had definitely happened to her father's business.

The date with Kang Hyuk had found her while she was anxiously spending her birthday like that. Seeing Kang Hyuk's pure and vigorous smile, a guy who was so considerate of her, allowed Ye-rin to brush aside her gloomy mood.

The only problem was, the live jazz that she had secretly looked forward to had been canceled.

"Everyone, we apologize for the wait. We will start the performance right away."

A sudden announcement rang throughout the store by mic.

"...?"

Surprised, Ye-rin looked at the stage.

And walking forward to appear on the stage were five men and women. Most of them were wearing black attire that allowed free movement, but interestingly, one man was in comfortable jeans and a blue shirt.

"H-hyuk..."

The short-haired man who came up onto the stage with the performers was indeed Kang Hyuk. Not believing her eyes, Ye-rin looked at Hyuk again.

In that moment, Ye-rin saw him flash a confident and refreshing smile.

"We apologize for being a little late. We hope you'll enjoy your night."

The mild-looking saxophone player, who looked to be in his early 40's, tilted his head in a brief bow.

Clap clap clap!

With the performers' greeting, the audience naturally applauded, and Kang Hyuk went to sit at the piano.

Boom boom boom!

The contrabass rang softly.

Ti-ring, ti-riing, puuuuu! (piano and brass sounds)

Then the harmony of several instruments began weaving a smooth, jazzy melody.

"Hyuk..."

A piece Ye-rin knew well, called Fly Me to the Moon, began flowing out as jazz.

And touched by immeasurable emotion, Ye-rin's large eyes were wet with tears.

* * *

'What a relief'

I had never been so grateful for my safari breeding program. I had ended up learning the piano because of my mom's opinion that even a panther struggling on Kilimanjaro needed to be able to play an instrument or two in order to lure in a mate.

Thanks to my mom, who had become an applied music professor,

despite majoring in the classics, I was capable of performing all sorts of styles, including jazz.

Thus I was able to safely overcome the crisis that had struck our first date.

Bada, boom boom, bada boom!

‘So this is an ensemble.’

Because jazz music was pleasant and comfortable to hear, I had often practiced standard jazz at home.

Although I had started playing for Ye-rin, at some point I became immersed in the ensemble of jazz.

Jazz, a type of music that was said to be loved by free-spirited people.

I closed my eyes and fell deeper into that mellow and harmonious world.

* * *

‘Impressive, Hyuk!’

At seventeen years, he was still a young boy. He didn’t fall behind even in the midst of professional players who made a living out of jazz. Rather,

the piano had somehow become the center of the jazz and Kang Hyuk had become the leader.

The sight of Hyuk, who was gently swaying with his eyes closed and absorbed in the jazz, made Ye-rin's heart race on and on.

Ever since he saved her from danger, she had truly looked forward to the day she could meet Hyuk, and after coincidentally entering the same school, she had been able to meet him. She had hesitated so much before talking to him at the school field trip, too.

'He's beautiful.'

Ye-rin was vividly experiencing the fact that men could also be beautiful at times.

Buoyed by a hazy feeling of intoxication, she had a taste of the illusion that she was flying towards the moon on the melody crafted by Hyuk.

* * *

'That's it! That's what it was!'

Jazz could only be played well if the ensemble was one.

In the middle of doing my best to play the piano out of consideration for the other players, an enlightenment suddenly came to me.

I had discovered the key that could unlock the 3rd Circle that had been my wall.

'3rd Circle magic starts from harmoniously combining magic up to the 2nd Circle. Just like how one plus one becomes two and two plus two becomes four, if I naturally combine them, I can break the wall in my magic. It's like how more water can be held if the vessel increases in size.'

From what Master Bumdalf had said, from the 3rd Circle onwards, you would receive the title of 'Mage' and be able to go out into the world and make a living out of it. But he had said that most Mages in training were unable to overcome the wall and go from the 2nd Circle to the 3rd Circle for their entire lives.

And now, I felt like I would be able to make a living as a Mage.

'Thank you, Ye-rin.'

Ye-rin, who stood with me on the starting point of a new life.

There was no doubt that she was the goddess of good fortune who watched over me.

True Wealth

"Levitation!"

Shwaa!

With my incantation, I felt the mana in my circle drain away with frightening speed.

Riiiise!

"Ohh, OHHHHHHHH! I'm up! I'm floating!"

At the same time, I rose into the air as if someone was lightly lifting my body.

Magic was truly something that was constantly giving me surprises.

I posed with my arms stretched forward in flight, as if I had become a baby Superman.

"Huhuhu. If I were to become an Archmage like Master, even world domination would be no problem."

The uses for magic were limitless. Though this was the cutting-edge 21st century, there was no end to the things that could be done with magic. You could rob a bank using Invisibility magic to hide yourself from

people, and you'd even be able to peep on the women's baths, a land that would forever capture your curiosity.

If you installed a safe Warp magic circle, you would be able to travel the world as much as you wanted, whenever you wanted. Not only that, the various attack and defense spells could make you invincible.

Furthermore, if you were to use extensive magic knowledge to develop new medicines, substances, or magic items, raking in a fortune would be as easy as pie.

"If I keep going straight like this, I should be able to reach the 4th Circle, or even the 5th Circle, in four years."

The new mana channeling method that Master had been unable to learn despite creating it, the internal chi channeling that combined magic with the related paths matched my hasty personality. What good would it be to become an old 8th Circle Archmage at a hundred years of age? My youth would be gone, and the beautiful girlfriends I would have been with would be reduced to bones and skin, and on the verge of returning to the ground.

'Let's learn it in one go! I'll grow at a high speed that no one has achieved in the history of magic!'

There were three distinct mana circles that I could feel in my chest. I could feel that the mana in my upper and lower danjeons were forming circles while communicating with each other.

‘3rd Circle magic isn’t enough. At best, the greatest attack magic is merely Lightning. Since I can’t use strong magic, there’s no magic I can use when I’m really in danger.’

Magic theories were whizzing through my mind. In order to cast magic instantly without a formula and an incantation, you had to be one circle higher than the spell. So simply learning 3rd Circle magic didn’t mean much. Instead of slowly casting magic without any protection, it was faster and more effective to just use my fist.

‘The 4th Circle! My next goal is the 4th Circle!’

Master had said, ‘once a Mage, always a Mage.’

I had also somehow become a Mage greedy for circles and magic knowledge.

‘I’ll learn Flight magic. Then I’ll go to the window where Ye-rin is sleeping, and... huhuhu...’

There was one lewd thought that fired up my fighting spirit. It was the reason I needed magic.

And later, I planned on passing it down to my kids, too. After making 108 spells that were very useful in real life, of course.

* * *

"Is this information accurate?"

"Yes, Master. The Magician company's private plane that we have been watching has been in Incheon International Airport for an extended time. And the person who used the plane is a 17 year old high schooler named Kang Hyuk."

"A high schooler, you say... he's definitely that old man's disciple. That old man who treats money like his own blood wouldn't give away his plane, otherwise."

A middle-aged man in his forties was sitting on a chair made with the finest crocodile skin. The white tiger hide and the ten odd rifles hung on the walls as decorative pieces were a testament to the man's remarkable social standing.

"Send some useful kids to observe the kid named Kang Hyuk."

"Yes, Master!"

A man with a deep scar stretching from his right eye to his mouth bowed.

The man in front, the one called master, had horrible scars over his forehead and was one of the three heads of the Triad. In Hong Kong, China, and the East, the sound of his name alone made people tremble.

His name was Chang Li.

He was one of the legendary killing machines in the Triad who had risen to his current position by his fists alone.

‘You old man... I’ve waited for this day. I can’t do anything to you, but I’ll trample all the sprouting Mages you’ve planted before they grow up. Arggh!’

Twenty or so years ago, he had gone into the Czech Republic for a contracted assassination and happened to become a Mage. At first, he had thought of the old man as a lunatic who was building castles in the air, but after seeing the terrifying magic with his own eyes, Chang Li became a Mage’s disciple. However, unable to overcome the wall of the 3rd Circle, even after several years of training. So Chang Li decided to kill the Mage and take his fortune.

There was an enormous fortune in the place called the magic tower. As well as an astronomical amount of money hidden away in every nation in the world. Even if he just robbed the magic tower, it held huge wealth that could start an organization with laughable ease. That’s why he planned on murdering the old man, but he failed.

An 8th Circle Archmage.

The upper circle magic he had only imagined was far greater than he’d ever thought. Expecting that Chang Li would betray him, the crazy Mage had already laid magic traps all over the place. And Chang Li had been forced to bash his head into the ground in order to survive.

‘Kang Hyuk... I sincerely hope you have the skills to survive me. Kukuku.’

Through the tenacious constitution he had been born with, and bloody training, Chang Li had trained 3rd Circle magic to its very limits.

Magic had gotten him to where he was now and was the true source of his strength.

* * *

"Hyuk, what should I do, I think my grades will fall this time."

"A man shouldn't cry just because his test scores fell a little!"

'Kukuku! Our midterms have finally ended.'

Even for an Archmage, midterms were an unavoidable part of Korea's education curriculum.

Joong Hyun was shaking as he held his last test paper, as if he had bombed his test.

'There's really no way for me to not love Master. Kukuku.'

I had grown smarter after learning magic. Truly, I had become so sharp that I could memorize everything in a book I read once, while concentrating.

And then, I took the tests.

There wasn't a single problem I couldn't answer.

'Now that I think about it, didn't Master say he also raised Einstein? Since he was said to have used about 20% of his brain... oohh! Then have I also come to possess such an outstanding brain?'

Like peeling an onion, I was discovering the immense benefits of magic one by one. If this kept going, I felt like I could even win a Nobel Prize.

"Hoho, good work, everyone. But since the end of midterms doesn't mean that your life's exams are over, please don't lose steam and keep going strong. There's nothing to lose by studying, after all. Hohohoho!"

Ms. Wang, the Dreaded Snow White who deflated everyone's spirits every time she opened her mouth. She was blathering on without even knowing the feelings of the kids who had been liberated from exams.

"Teacher, my grandfather told me to bring over all my friends who finished their exams."

"Oh, really? You're saying Chairman Hwang said that, right?"

"Yes. He said he would invite everyone to our Ohsung Hotel."

'Just look at him.'

I had warned him not to flaunt his money, but Hwang Sung-taek yapped through his snout with a proud look.

"The Ohsung Hotel is good. I was there not long ago too, and the food is really flawless and tasty."

The Ohsung Group was second to none in the Republic of Korea. As the direct grandson of that Ohsung Group's chairman, Hwang Sung-taek was proudly treating the group like it was his.

"A bus has been prepared outside. We can go now."

"Hoho, sounds good. Everyone, your friend's grandfather invited us, so we all have to go, right? Let's play as much as we want, today."

Though she had been pressuring us to study because 'the end of midterms doesn't mean your life's exams are over' just a moment ago, Ms. Wang's lips stretched ear to ear at the mere mention of an invitation to the hotel, as she roused the kids.

"Wow! I heard the Ohsung Hotel buffet is tasty; we get to stuff ourselves today!"

"Hoho! It's good to have a well-off friend after all."

Along with the Daehan Group, the Ohsung Group was one of the big conglomerates in Korea. The kids in the class were clamoring and looking forward to it.

“Well, if you’re busy and don’t want to go, then you don’t need to force yourself to go. I’m especially saying this to those who could get lost from the hotel.”

Laughing coldly as he spoke, Hwang Sung-taek looked at me.

‘That, that brat! Arrrggh!’

I had planned on giving him a scolding even if he hadn’t said that, but now this Hwang Sung-taek was really testing the limits of my patience.

‘Fine, I’ll go once. To see how well-off you really are.’

I had never been to the Ohsung Hotel before in my life. I smiled as I ground my teeth.

Mask the dagger in thy heart. A blade was hidden well within in my smile.

* * *

“Isn’t this nice~?”

“As expected of the Ohsung Hotel!”

Wearing our school uniforms, we all arrived at the Ohsung Hotel’s

buffet. The mellow sound of a 10-person chamber ensemble filled the air, around what seemed to be over a hundred different kinds of top-class dishes. The dishes were clamoring to be put into our impoverished stomachs.

‘This is pretty good, isn’t it? My house is nearby and I won’t have to worry about my meals, too.’

A ridiculous thought occurred to me as soon as I saw the Ohsung Hotel’s buffet.

“Miss Manager.”

“Yes, is there something wrong?”

I called the female staff member who seemed to be a manager. She was looking around while stiff with tension because the chairman’s heir and his friends had come.

“How much is this?”

The manager, whose nametag read ‘Lee Yun-shil,’ followed my finger to the buffet. “At dinner time, it is about \$120, including additional tax. But Daehan High School students, and even their immediate family members, get a 50% discount by the chairman’s special orders.”

As befitting an employee at a top-class hotel, the manager put on a business smile and kindly explained.

"No, not that— how much is this hotel?"

"What? The, the hotel?" My nonchalant query about the hotel's price briefly confused the manager Lee Yun-shil. "Our hotel is an unlisted company, so I do not know the exact price. But since it's \$50 per unlisted share... I can say that about \$1.2 million would be sufficient."

Perhaps thinking that it was just a student's thoughtless remark, Manager Lee Yun-shil emphasized the \$1.2 million part.

"What is your dream, miss?"

"What? My dream?" The manager lady thought for a brief moment while looking at me, a person asking weird questions instead of eating. She was probably thinking that I was asking all sorts of questions even though I wasn't a matchmaker or life counselor. "Of course, it's to be a Hotel Administrator, the biggest dream a hotelier can have. For that dream, I have lived while doing my best."

'Oh! This lady is pretty cool.'

It was said that those who dream are beautiful. The pretty lady in her late twenties said that she wanted to become a Hotel Administrator with sparkling eyes.

"Then you'll get some good news soon."

"What? Good news?" asked Manager Lee Yun-shil, failing to understand what I meant.

"I need a better place to eat, you see. So I was thinking about buying this hotel," I whispered quietly in her ear, as if telling a secret.

" ... "

But she was completely silent for a moment.

"If you really do take over the hotel, please leave the administration to me. I will make it the top hotel in all of Korea, no, the entire world."

Manager Lee Yun-shil must have taken it as a joke, because she regained her composure after a moment and whispered into my ear with a grin. She was such a charming woman that I would want to introduce her to an older bro, if I had one.

* * *

Munch munch.

I dipped meaty king crab pieces in kiwi sauce and digged in.

'The taste is phenomenal.'

Even though our school meals were considered the best in the nation,

they couldn't match up to a first-class hotel buffet. Moreover, having been unable to eat a proper meal for the past few days because my mom was gone, I was busy stuffing my face as I went around the buffet booths, thematically arranged by country— Korea, Japan, China, as well as cuisine from every continent.

'The seasoning is just right, and the ingredients are fresh, too. Kyaa! Since the food was also made skillfully by the chefs, it's seriously the embodiment of perfection.'

Cooked to match the special characteristics of each dish, the full-course meal of delicacies melted gently on the tongue.

"You were hungry, weren't you, Hyuk?"

"Hm? Not really. It's just that I'm offended by our 'friend's' consideration, so I'm eating up for him. But Ye-rin."

"Yeah?"

I called Ye-rin, who was only nibbling on a few kinds of salad even in the face of global delicacies. "My mom says this, but you've got to eat heartily to be able to pump out babies later when you get married, y'know?"

"Pump out? Pfft, this isn't the primeval times or anything."

I was worrying about our future, and at my suggestive words, Seo Ye-rin made a unique 'pfft' sound and blushed.

‘Gosh, just looking at her makes me full.’

“You, you two are acting weird?”

Whether it was coincidence or inevitable, Joong Hyun and I sat together — we were as inseparable as elastic bands in panties, after all. But Ye-rin sat next to us without reserve, making me happy. That made Joong Hyun, who had been stuffing his face with food, look at Ye-rin and me with suspicious eyes.

‘The rascal, he’s more perceptive than he looks.’ I was gratified by Joong Hyun’s unexpected senses.

“You sure are eating as well as pigs.”

While Joong Hyun, Ye-rin, and I were happily eating our meal, we heard a voice in which all respect had seriously been thrown into a ditch.

“Since you were begging like a loser in Europe, I suppose you’re hungry.”

“Kuku! Pig out, you Korean retard.”

‘Would you look at these kids?’

The three young brats were ignoring the saying that you shouldn’t mess with a dog when it’s eating. They had appeared out of nowhere and

were ignorantly pissing me off. Especially Hwang Sung-taek, who was wearing a big smirk on his face, even though he was just a lump of three hundred thousand years of bad luck.

‘Should I give him a taste of hell today?’ I briefly fell into contemplation.

“Kang Hyuk, eat lots. When else will brats from poor families get to come to a place like this, after all. Kuku. Though I can feed you every day if you please me, the Crown Prince. Isn’t that right, Seo Ye-rin?”

[T/N: I just realized it, but Hwang Sung-taek’s nickname, Crown Prince, is a play off of his last name. Crown Prince in Korean is ‘HWANG tae ja.’]

The barbs went from me to Ye-rin.

“Hmph.”

But the proud lily wasn’t meant to answer a weed. Ye-rin made a ‘hmph’ sound as she turned her head to look out the window.

‘This little brat seriously doesn’t know what’s really going on.’

The me of the past would have suffered a wounded pride, but after becoming a rich man who had nothing to be jealous of, Hwang Sung-taek’s bitching was laughable.

“The Chairman is coming.”

"What, for the Chairman to suddenly..."

As I was contemplating how to mess with Hwang Sung-taek so that the rumors would fly, the buffet entrance became noisy.

"Grandpa!"

'Grandpa? Chairman Hwang Man-hyuk of the Ohsung Group?'

Dragging a retinue of 10 or so attendants behind him, the chairman of the Ohsung Group, Hwang Man-hyuk, a person I had seen often on TV, came inside. Seeing that, Hwang Sung-taek ran towards him like a puppy, calling his grandpa.

'Lol, short legs run in the family.'

With his grizzled hair, the 70 year old Chairman Hwang Man-hyuk crouched like he was taking a poo, a posture that matched his low height, to embrace his grandson.

"Ahh, you rascal. You've grown so much you could get married the day after tomorrow, you rascal."

Hwang Man-hyuk made a smile that made him look good-natured as he tousled his puppy's hair. Contrary to my fund manager father cursing the chairman, calling him a vicious conglomerate that razed small businesses, he looked decent on the outside. He looked as mild as the generous KFC grandpa.

"Hello? Hoho! I am Wang Sun-nyeo, Sung-taek's homeroom teacher. It is an honor to meet you like this. Hohoho!" said the Snow White Ms. Wang Sun-nyeo, with a sophisticated air just dripping with pretense.

"Ah, so you are Sung-taek's homeroom teacher. I should have sought you out and said my greetings, but we finally meet."

"Hoho, please. How could the person leading Ohsung Group, which drives South Korea, come to the school? I will look after Sung-taek both materially and emotionally, so please do not worry."

Caked in makeup, Ms. Wang Sun-nyeo defined the epitome of social life and flattery.

"If you do, I won't have anything to worry about. Then, I will send you a small token of my sincerity sometime, please accept it. I leave Sung-taek, who will lead our Ohsung Group in the future, in your care."

When else would you get to see the chairman of the great Ohsung Group paying his respects to a teacher? Moreover, at the words 'small token of my sincerity,' Ms. Wang Sun-nyeo beamed with joy, even under all that makeup. It was seriously embarrassing that she was our homeroom teacher.

"General Manager."

"Yes, Chairman." At the Chairman's beckoning, the hotel's General Manager answered immediately.

"Tell the kitchen to make their special menu. The friends of my grandson are here..."

Maybe he usually talked like this, but the end of Chairman Hwang's sentence trailed off lightly.

"Before you came, I already informed each kitchen to make their special menu."

As if he were frozen in front of a lance-corporal division commander in the army, the General Manager was stock-still before Chairman Hwang.

'Tch, the brat is that old man's grandson after all.'

I thought I could surmise why Hwang Sung-taek was so fucking rude. The person he had watched and learned from, his grandpa, just treated everyone under him like shit. That's why the young bastard had lost his sense of manners.

"Alright, everyone! Shouldn't we thank the chairman of the great Ohsung Group, Hwang Man-hyuk, who invited us today?"

Ms. Wang Sun-nyeo emphasized the 'great Ohsung Group' part even though she wasn't even a public relations manager of the Ohsung Group.

"Thank you very much."

“Chairman, you’re the best!”

Clap clap clap!

For some reason, because there were only a few guests outside of our group and it was mostly the kids from our class, the raucous greetings and applause vigorously filled the hall. Only Ye-rin and I were silent with apathetic expressions. Only Ye-rin and I were silent with apathetic expressions.

“Thank you. Now, please return to your meals. It seems that the senseless appearance of an old man like me simply got in the way of your meal.”

As was appropriate for a tycoon who held politics and the economy in his hands, he presented himself as benevolent even in front of the kids.

‘I know. Your heart is no better than a coal-black crow.’

Unlike the other kids, I had heard of the Ohsung Group’s extremely terrible deeds through my father. It was said that Hwang Man-hyuk’s specialty was controlling skillful small businesses and either slowly cutting their unit prices, or threatening them, by picking on them to make them do as he wanted.

“Then everyone, please enjoy your time here, before you go. Sung-taek, go take your friends who can make it to Ohsung Land tomorrow, too. I’ll let them know.”

[T/N: Ohsung Land is a theme park, like Disney Land.]

"Thanks grandpa. Hehe."

'He's seriously gonna roll over.'

Though he was all sorts of arrogant at school, in front of his grandpa, the bastard was wagging his tail and panting like a mutt.

I pushed out my chair and stood.

"Hyuk, where are you going?"

At that, Ye-rin asked me where I was going.

"There's someone I have to admonish with some advice about life."

I answered her and ran outside to where Chairman Hwang had gone. Something I absolutely wanted to tell him had suddenly occurred to me.

* * *

"Chairman Hwang!" I called loudly to Chairman Hwang, who had left the buffet and was standing in front of the elevator.

"You are? A friend of Sung-taek?"

He must have thought that I had followed him out in order to express my thanks, because Chairman Hwang Man-hyuk greeted me warmly.

"My name is Kang Hyuk. There's something I want to ask."

"A question? Haha! You are brave for a youngster." Though he said that, the guards and attendants around Chairman Hwang had somehow increased to 20 or so people. "Alright, what is your question?"

Chairman Hwang still hadn't dropped his facade.

"What is your dream, Chairman?"

"Dream?"

Hwang Man-hyuk was slightly confused by the sudden talk about dreams.

"You! Are you holding up the busy Chairman with a joke!"

A man who looked to be the Chief Secretary came forward with a slight scowl on his face.

"I don't have anything so unnecessary as a dream. I'm simply fiercely living the life I was given."

‘To not have a dream... I see.’

When I was young, my grandpa held me and told me something, as if telling me a story. There is no one as happy as someone who dreams, and nothing as wretched and fearful as someone who doesn’t have a dream.

“Thank you for your time. I will continue to think deeply on it.” I sharply bowed and returned to the inside of the buffet hall.

“You, what is your name?”

I heard the Chairman’s stout voice behind me.

“Kang Hyuk, my name is Kang Hyuk.”

‘It is a name you will come to hear often in the future.’

The leader of conglomerate at the forefront of South Korea was someone without a dream. It was understandable if the people below him were that way, but a leader couldn’t be like that.

In an organization, the leader’s dream was the dream of those beneath him.

* * *

“Hwang Sung-taek, I ate well thanks to you.”

"Yeah? Looks like you've finally figured out your place?"

I came back in and relayed my thanks to Hwang Sung-taek, who was holding a glass with a cocky posture.

"You brat, I thought you might be rich or something from the way you went around with your head raised high and all despite being utterly penniless, but heh..."

"Keke, keep your head down in the future."

At Hwang Sung-taek's words, the two domesticated hunting dogs by his side barked noisily.

"So that's why, I'm giving you guys an invitation for tomorrow."

"Invitation?"

"All you little kids!" I simply ignored Sung-taek's question and called all the kids who were immersed in stuffing their faces with food.

'The rascals! I'll show them a proper paradise on earth.'

I couldn't lose to the likes of the insulting Ohsung Group.

"Tomorrow, by 10 am, come with your passports to departure gate A in

the Incheon International Airport.”

“Passport? Puhaha! Why? Are we gonna take our passports and go abroad or something?”

Still failing to understand the situation, Hwang Sung-taek laughed his head off.

“Teacher, you are free from tomorrow throughout the weekend, right?”

“Huh? Well, I don’t really have any plans, but...”

It wasn’t that she didn’t have any plans; the spinster Ms. Wang actually didn’t have anything to do. She didn’t know that there was sauce splattered on her lips.

“Then please come. Each and every one of you kiddos should come too. If you don’t, you’ll regret it for the rest of your life.”

I would teach them what true wealth was.

“Hwang Sung-taek, and you two. Be sure to come. Don’t be cowards that reject my invitation. Kuku.”

“What did you say? Hmph! Alright. I’ll definitely come, you shithead!”

This was the baiting skill I had learned from Master. Without fail, the

thoughtless carp head fell for the bait.

"Also, you don't have to bring much. Just bring some underwear to change into and the swimsuit that matches your figure the most."

My exceedingly confident voice rang within the buffet hall.

'You rascals, this is just the beginning!'

And then, I steadily made plans. I would show the youngsters the paradise I dreamt of.

* * *

"What's going on today?"

"You didn't know? You remember the kid who got off on the A380 last time, right?"

"Yeah. Of course I remember. Even now, it seems like a dream when I think of it, seriously. Jeez, I heard that prime ministers from Europe and the leaders of several nations called the airport president, saying to give the kid maximum priority and protocol."

"The kid in question is departing on a flight today. And with thirty-five kids from his class, at that."

"W-what did you say?!"

The protocol team of the Incheon Airport received immeasurable jealousy from every other department each month. Yet they were thrown into chaos again by a single call that came in late on Saturday night. They had gotten word that the plane would be formally departing through Tollgate 9. And though they would be serving not a high-ranking bureaucrat, but a mere kid, they were busy early in the morning. There was much to do in order to screen not just one or two, but thirty-five kids for departure.

"Omo, even the National Intelligence Service staff are here!"

While swiftly moving through their protocol routines, the protocol team had seen just about everything they could be surprised at. As top veterans, their work wasn't difficult for them, but...

"I am the Section Chief of National Security, Choi Byung-yul. I ask that you make it so that the people who will depart today can leave after a basic departure screening."

Wearing gray trench coats, the three NIS members gave a notice to the chief of the protocol team.

"Yes, I understand."

Everyone besides the President had to undergo a departure examination. But the person related to National Security was telling them to give the kids a basic departure screening, and they had to follow the

orders of a national agency.

That threw everyone into anxiety again. A single kid, who was neither the President nor a high-ranking VIP, was departing under the primary protection of the National Intelligence Service.

Even as they moved, the protocol team members were busy racking their small brains to figure out who the kid really was.

* * *

"Welcome, teacher!"

"Hyuk, hoho. I came because you told me to, but... why did you call us here today?"

It was Ms. Wang Sun-nyeo, our homeroom teacher who was childish, a bit of an airhead, and acted perfectly frivolous on top of that. Though I hadn't said anything about it, she had appeared with the math teacher, Lee Ji-hae.

"Haha, I called you here in order to show you a small token of my sincerity towards you, who worked so hard to teach us. And to the kids whose field trip I ruined."

"Token of your sincerity?"

She had probably been curious about it all night.

"Hyuk, I came because Ms. Wang told me to, but... where are we going today?"

The perfect specimen of an intellectual yet considerate teacher, Ms. Lee Ji-hae, asked about my intentions with part worry, part doubt in her eyes.

"You'll find out if you wait just a moment, you two teachers who would make a fairy cry due to your beauty."

"Hohoho, our Hyuk sure has perceptive eyes."

Not knowing she was getting high praise due to Ms. Lee Ji-hae, the spinster Ms. Wang Sun-nyeo was very happy.

She didn't know... That all kinds of tragedies were waiting for her all throughout this trip, that is.

"Hyuk!"

"Hey Hyuk!"

While I was chatting a bit with the teachers, the kids gathered in twos and threes in front of the gate.

'Oh, cutie! You've got sense, huh?'

With a pair of sunglasses that didn't fall behind the trends atop her head, Seo Ye-rin appeared with her long black hair flowing to and fro. The revealing denim shorts she ventured to wear even in the chilly weather, as well as the white shirt she liked, made her shine amongst the second-rate women around her.

'Ms. Lee Ji-hae is pretty good, but youth is good after all!'

Ye-rin, a haughty lily; and Ms. Lee Ji-hae, a blooming cosmos whose looks rivaled Ye-rin's. With these two beauties by my side, my shoulders automatically straightened with pride.

"Hehe, Hyuk. I'm here."

Though I had lightly said we were going on a trip, Joong Hyun appeared while determinedly dragging a large suitcase. He must have picked up something from my words to pack a swimsuit, because he came with a straw hat pressed to his head.

"Y-yeah. Thanks for coming, my best friend."

Joong Hyun, my good-natured best friend who truly believed in me, Kang Hyuk. Though Joong Hyun had a university president for a father, he never forgot his humility and performed his duty as a friend to the utmost. I didn't feel embarrassed at all to call him my friend.

"Kang Hyuk, I came because you told me to, but... isn't this just gonna be a waste of time? Surely you didn't call us here to get discounts with our passports at the airport cafeteria, right?"

As soon as he arrived, Hwang Sung-taek didn't even greet the teachers and started by picking a fight. Though I was sure I had told him to bring at least a swimsuit, he had come in his normal clothes without bringing anything. Except for the mutts at his side, as always.

"Hwang Sung-taek, do the two teachers here look like cleaning ladies to you? I thought you were raised in a distinguished family, but aren't you just from a fractured, nameless family instead?"

"W-what! You little shit!"

'Huhu. You brat, I've got you now.'

Today was the day. The day I would give these mongrels some education on morals.

"Alright, it looks like everyone is here, so follow me."

"Hyuk, where are we going?"

"Hmph! Who is he to tell us to follow."

They had all come because I had told them to, but they probably wanted to rest since it was their Saturday weekend, a time as precious as gold. But since Hwang Sung-taek, who dominated the class, was participating, and even the teacher had said she was coming, they had also come. Actually, a few of them probably just came because they were

curious about what I was doing.

‘I’m seriously a noble here.’

Ms. Lee Ji-hae was walking by my side because she was a teacher, and Seo Ye-rin was walking by my side as if it was the obvious thing to do, while receiving the glances of the other kids. My heart raced and pumped like crazy at the alluring fragrance of the two most beautiful ladies.

Like that, I walked towards not the regular departure area, but to the VIP room used by distinguished guests.

* * *

“Eh, EEHHH?”

“Is this the VIP room I’ve only heard of?”

“Isn’t it called the Pine Room?”

The VIP protocol room, which could only be used by former and current presidents, as well as high-ranking figures, including the three heads of departments. Having followed me in, the kids were busy crying out inside the vintage VIP room, also known as the Pine Room.

“Hyuk, what’s going on?” asked Ms. Wang as she looked around in all directions. As soon as she had stepped in, the scenery inside the room

had made her lose her nerve.

"Welcome. Please wait a moment, we will guide you to the gate right away."

Wearing a formal ivory suit, the beautiful protocol team lady I'd met when I handed here bowed her head. The fellows in my classroom just stared at me, without even being able to think of sitting on the precious sofas. It was as if they were kindergarteners who had come out on a picnic and were looking at their teacher for directions.

"Everyone, sit down. The lady told us to wait a bit. Teachers, please sit."

"O-okay."

As I flopped down onto my seat and asked them to sit, Ms. Wang and Ms. Lee Ji-hae very carefully sat down on the pine colored sofas.

"Wow, so soft. The sofas at my house are like hemp cloth in comparison."

Ms. Wang, the chattermouth, spat out something without any dignity as she sat down.

"What will you drink for tea? We have wild ginseng tea, Korean honey tea, lingzhi tea, 20-year-old pu-erh tea, black tea, and Arabian instant coffee. We will also immediately prepare any drinks you require."

The hospitably smiling protocol team ladies approached the kids, who were awkwardly incapable of even sitting down.

"Please give me black tea." Having carefully sat down on just the edge of the sofa by my side, Ye-rin was the first to speak.

"Hoho~ even amongst all those bla bla teas, isn't the wild ginseng tea the way to go? Ms. Lee, you're going to drink the wild ginseng tea too, right?"

"N-no, I want to drink a cup of the instant coffee."

Unlike Ms. Wang, who practically advertised her old spinster ways in neon letters, Ms. Lee Ji-hae maintained her dignity. Whoever it was, the person who married her would be winning the jackpot.

'Rascal, are you finally getting a bit scared?'

From the moment we had gone into the airport protocol VIP room, Hwang Sung-taek had realized something was wrong and was making an expression like that of a puppy that needed to poo. He was speechlessly exchanging serious looks with his two cronies in the corner.

"Mister Kang Hyuk, where are you?"

'Hm?'

While I was feeling happy because Hwang Sung-taek's distress was my

happiness, I heard a low voice call my name. A sharp-looking man in his early forties wearing a trench coat was looking for me.

"I am Kang Hyuk."

"I am the Section Chief of the NIS, Choi Byung-yul."

"Huh? Th-the NIS?"

'What? Why the NIS?"

Even I didn't expect the NIS members, who strove to gather intelligence for the national interest, and catch spies, to show up.

"If at anytime there is any discomfort in your daily life, or something you need, please contact me at this number."

Even though he wasn't a worker at a real estate agency, the section chief named Choi Byung-yul passed me a business card with a courteous smile.

'Awwh yeaah! You've got to meet a well-off master after all!'

I roughly understood. That Master was at the center of everything.

"Haha! Thank you for working day and night. I will give you a call next time."

Section Chief Choi raised my value with his appearance. Though he had suddenly made me slightly worried about the nation's security, today was really my day.

"The departure screening has been completed. You may now board."

A lady of the protocol team appeared with the passports they had collected from us in a tidy wooden basket.

'Then shall we depart?'

After talking big to the kids last night, I had come back home and asked for big sis Marisol's help. I asked for a place where we could swim regardless of the season because I was going to go play with the kids in my class.

It was the beginning of a fateful day.

* * *

"T-this is a plane?"

"It's wider than the living room in my house!"

"Welcome. We hope you have an enjoyable trip."

‘Who are these goddesses?’

The moment we boarded the private A380 plane, 10 or so beauties from various nations greeted us at the entrance. Including big sis Marisol, beautiful crew ladies from Europe, Japan, and Korea courteously greeted the kids.

“Mister Hyuk, it has been a while.”

“Haha! Big sis Marisol, you have become more beautiful in the time I hadn’t seen you.”

“Hoho! Hyuk, you have also become manlier in a few months time, to the point of being desirable.”

‘Hohshit, I’m desirable.’

Having seriously answered something I said jokingly, big sis Marisol’s bewitching blue eyes sparkled. All the kids were shocked by the French that skillfully flowed from my mouth, and were staring at me.

“The preparations?”

“You can look forward to it, Hyuk~!”

‘Why does my tongue roll like this?’

The French language was already as smooth as oil in a frypan, but when I rolled my tongue even more, it felt like butter and oil had combined and I was dancing the blues.

‘Kuku, a private plane has gotta be at this level, at the very least.’

Even to my eyes, the A380 boasted enormous space. The kids who had been shouting and cheering had shut their mouths at some point, and quietly followed me in.

And from that moment on, I was king.

* * *

“Woow~! The plane doesn’t even shake.”

“So you’re saying this is the A380 I’ve only heard of, right?”

‘Brats, so uncouth...’

Even though Daehan High School was sponsored by the Daehan Group, at the time of the Europe field trip, we had been assigned to the economy class. After having to sit on a plane without rest for several tens of hours, the kids had nightmares about planes. But this two-floor airbus’ enormous size swallowed dozens of kids without any sign that we were here.

‘You rascal, I see you’ve completely lowered your tail. Kuku.’

Even in their awe, the kids who met eyes with me looked at me with respect in their shining eyes. But even amongst that respect, Hwang Sung-taek was crouched in the corner with a big scowl on his face. He might be the grandson of the Ohsung Group's Chairman, but even he couldn't use such a huge plane as his personal ride.

"How is it, it's worth seeing, right?"

The wicked feelings were steadily growing in the corner. Unable to resist the temptation, I approached Hwang Sung-taek and his cronies and pretended to be friendly.

Hwang Sung-taek ground his teeth in response.

'Would you just look at this bastard?'

He must have not lost his nerve yet with this, because Hwang Sung-taek ground his teeth as animosity welled in his eyes.

"Hey, you faithful dogs. If you're hungry, go ask those ladies for something to eat. It's gonna be hard taking care of your bad-tempered master for the entire day."

'I'm way too kind.'

Even to my thinking, I was impossibly considerate. Whoever it was, the woman who lived with me would surely send a barrage of thank you's to

the god above.

"Kang... Hyuk... you bastard..."

Hwang Sung-taek spat out my name syllable by syllable.

"Look forward to it. I'll show you what true wealth is. Huhuhu."

Someone who had been raised through money had to return to his senses by getting beaten down by money. My insightful actions were meant to teach a lesson to this pitiful guy who had a promising future ahead of him. The sky was surely sending down blessings for the sake of a guy like me.

"Lala~ lalalala~"

I began involuntarily humming.

Inside this spacious airplane, the kids who had been invited to my paradise were yelling happily.

* * *

"Rouen?"

"Shari..."

[T/N: Hyuk is speaking in a different language with one of the crew members here. Not sure what language it is though...]

"Hahaha!"

'What in the world is Hyuk's real identity?'

Drinking fresh, sweet kiwi juice, Ye-rin fell into contemplation. Sitting on a VIP seat that seemed to have been made for him, Kang Hyuk was communicating with the passing crew members in various languages.

He didn't seem like the Hyuk she had known so far.

He was proficient in not only Taekwondo, but also Kumdo, and had remarkable skill in the piano and in music, enough to be able to play jazz. This time, he was surprising Ye-rin with his skill in languages.

'At the very least, he knows five languages. And it's perfect, with native accents too.'

Hyuk's language ability was so outstanding that he could give and receive jokes with the crew members. Seeing that, Ye-rin fell deep into the pit that was suspicion.

'And what's with this airplane? From what I heard, it's a next generation airliner made by the European company Airbus, but why is Hyuk using it like his personal plane?'

There were more than just one or two suspicious things. Because she had done her share of going on trips abroad from an early age, she knew what an airport's protocol team did, and she was also well aware of how much a huge plane like this cost.

'Kang Hyuk, who are you really?'

That was the question in Ye-rin's heart.

But Hyuk did not answer. He only drank happily as he conversed, enjoying this time.

* * *

"Wooow!"

"I-is this really the human world?"

After a nonstop flight from Incheon to the Ibrahim International Airport, we transferred onto a 50-man airplane and arrived at a 6-star pool resort called Nikanilu on Dhonakulhi Island.

The multitude of picturesque rooms of the resort on the small island, as well as the pearly beach beneath our feet, made us wonder if this was heaven.

'Thank you, big sis Marisol. Huhu.'

For some reason, big sis Marisol had followed us all the way here.

"Hyuk, I'm in total bliss." Not just the kids, but Ms. Wang Sun-nyeo was also moved and was tightly grasping her hands. "Sobsob, the honeymoon vacation destination of my dreams is exactly a place like this! AH! Ocean, here I come!"

Crying and stretching out her arms, Ms. Wang ran into the ocean, which incidentally had a coral reef.

"Lady Marisol."

"Mister Hyuk, did you call?"

'Gulp.'

Wearing a mini skirt and a sleeveless shirt that clearly revealed the cleavage of her big boobs, the slim, 5'7" tall Marisol smiled brightly as she answered me.

'She's bomb. Just bomb.'

Nothing more needed to be said.

As a lady of France, a nation that preferred curves over girls with straight lines, she had a voluptuous body. If the sight of her didn't make you drool, then you were either just a friend or gay.

"Is this also..."

"Hoho, that's right. This is one of the group's investments. Besides this place, the company connected to the group is investing in every tourist destination in the world, like Fiji, Bali, Hawaii, and Australia."

'... Impressive.'

There was nothing more to say. It was likely that even Master Bumdalf didn't know how much of his wealth was rolling around in the world.

"We welcome you~!"

Diiing~ Diiiiinggg~

Suddenly, with the sound of a cheerful music, dozens of hotel staff members appeared holding bouquets.

They then enthusiastically greeted the kids and me.

'Then shall we have some fun?'

I acted dignified in front of the kids, but how could I have experienced something so surreal before?

But I had to be dignified. Because the lovable kids were standing in a line behind my back, believing in me, their ignorant general.

Eat Fuck!

[TL : normally it should be "eat shit" as how can someone eat fuck]

"Kyaa~!"

The clear, pure, and clean cobalt waters of the Mediterranean flowed below the resort.

Having changed into cool flower print shorts, I was now drinking fresh tropical fruit juice while sitting on a beach chair, in the shade. It'd been briefly noisy because of Ms.Wang losing her senses upon seeing the ocean, but we'd soon all taken up rooms in the resort with people we liked. After a Mediterranean lunch, which was comprised of all sorts of seafood, we were enjoying a relaxing afternoon.

'A place like this is a scenic paradise, there's nothing more I could want.'

This was the ideal relaxation that I had dreamed of. A youthful adolescence enjoyed with the ever-so-blue sea and the world's most beautiful women at my side in hot, but not sticky weather.

Even though he was rotting in money, I wasn't jealous at all of my master, who locked himself up in the underground magic tower and guffawed while watching TV.

So what if he was an 8th Circle Mage.

I wasn't jealous at all. After all, he had been so crazy about magic that

he never got to ride the stormy period of adolescence, a truly important time in life.

"Hohoho!"

"Hahahaha! S-stop that!"

'Huhu, everyone went to the swimming pool, I see.'

As was seemly for a 6-star hotel, in terms of facilities, it didn't fall behind any first-class hotel. With a spa, sauna, swimming pool, buffet, restaurant, bar, yoga studio, fitness gym, library, and etc., there was nothing it didn't have. Moreover, we could use all the facilities as much as we wanted. Matching their lively youth, the kids had eaten lunch, changed into their swimsuits without a hitch, and had gathered in the swimming pool.

'Shall I go, too?'

For some reason, Marisol had prepared a suite room for my private use.

'Ye-rin is probably there, too. And... Ms. Lee as well. Huhuhu.'

The artful bodies of the two women made my chest burn at the mere thought of them. With bated breath, I headed to the outdoors swimming pool.

"Hyuk~!"

'Guhh!'

The slightly nasally voice of a woman called me as I walked towards the swimming pool.

'Hot damn! Is that really the body of a human being?'

A sensuous body with a Venus-level, slender S-line, which didn't even know the meaning of flat! Her large boobs of absolute fertility would make even milk cows cry and hail them as 'your highnesses'. The important parts were just barely hidden by two white strings, and painted in white jade skin was her slim, pencil-thin waist, so small that it was regrettable. Under that were her sexy legs, as stretched out as the highway. Tied together with string was her swimsuit, which could certainly be called panties.

'Big sis Marisol, why do you want to make this young one fall into cardiac arrest?'

Having appeared like the the reincarnation of a perfect beauty, Marisol would make even an ascetic who had undergone meditation training for 30 years, and was about to reach nirvana, ask to drink a glass of rice liquor with her. The peculiar smile on her lips was pouring oil all over my blazing heart.

"Ha, haha, Marisol."

My eyes moved wildly as I smiled awkwardly.

"Hyuk, do you have time in the evening today?"

"Huh? T-the evening?"

'Big sis, why do you ask. Keuu, of course I've got plenty of time.'

"Maybe. I have to make a campfire with the kids, and also..."

Contrary to my thoughts, the sounds that came out of me were half rejection. I had no confidence that I'd be able to take it if Marisol were to come out like this at night, too. I was still just a rugged panther that had only grown enough to move out of his parent's house.

"Hoho, I will wait for you. Even if I have to stay up all night..."

After saying some strangely suggestive words, Marisol threw a wink at me.

'My heart's gonna burst. Seriously...'

Even without this, her looks that resembled Sophie Marceau made my heart go thumping every time I saw her. But Marisol had explicitly invited me.

'Aaagh! How can a butt be so attractive!'

I watched Marisol's back as she walked towards the ocean after leaving me a wink. Every time her explosively sexy tush twitched, the flesh on my cheeks also twitched.

'Until the East Sea's waters run dry and Mt. Baekdu is worn away...'

And I began singing the national anthem.

Just about every man knew that singing the national anthem was the best thing for cooling a blazing heart.

* * *

"Hoho, refreshing!"

"I'm so happy! I'm so happy I could die!"

The gently blowing Mediterranean wind tickled the long palm leaves as it whispered past, and the fairies under the trees were immersed in playing in the water, unaware that a woodcutter was visiting.

[T/N: Refers to a famous Korean folktale. A woodcutter manages to take a fairy as his wife by hiding her winged clothing while she is bathing. For the full story, look it up.]

'For Hye-jin to have a body like that! Oohh, Joo-hee's body gives off such luster—!'

Honestly, besides Ye-rin and Ms. Lee Ji-hae, I hadn't expected much from the other girls in our class. But a few of the ladies splashing like freshly caught mermaids were more than enough to make me happy.

'As expected!'

And upon discovering two women who didn't disappoint my expectations, I nodded. I didn't know when the two of them had become friends, but they were chummily lying on beach chairs and enjoying a sun tan.

They were just 10 meters away from me.

Even without Magic Eye, which would let me see far distances, I was perfectly able to record everything about the two girls in my mind.

'D-dayummm.'

That was what the young man Morco spluttered every time he saw his fake wife, Song Dam-bi in the show, 'We Got Married Yesterday.'

[T/N: The actual show is called 'We Got Married.' It pairs up celebrities in make-believe marriages. One of the pairs was a model named Marco and a singer/actress named Son Dam-bi.]

The exclamation was really, vibrantly satisfying to say. It was the ultimate exclamation for a woman who brought infinite delight to your eyes, and even set your spirit ablaze. Though they fell short of Marisol, there was only one word that was sufficient to express the silhouettes of

the incredibly smooth bodies of the two ladies who were lying down with their knees slightly bent.

‘Dayummm’ was the only word that cut it.

If Marisol’s figure was the Angelina Jolie style westerner’s figure, then even though the two girls fell slightly short, they were still well-proportioned beauties who would definitely show anyone looking that this was the beauty of the East.

‘I made an outstanding choice!’

My goal had been to have a vacation that completely blew away the fatigue in my body and mind. It was an unexpected, spontaneous vacation that was meant to crush Hwang Sung-taek, but as far as choices went, it was totally awesome.

The saying, ‘Catch the pheasant, pick the egg, and kill two birds with one stone’ existed for a situation like this.

“Hyuk, what’s up?”

‘Eh?’

I heard a friendly voice from behind my back. With a feeling of foreboding, I turned my head slightly.

“ARGH!”

‘Holy shit! Oh Lord!’

Maybe this is how it would feel to be on an incredibly refreshing walk on the beach with the woman you loved, and then have a small bird poop right into your eyes. It was so disconcerting that I didn’t know where to put my eyes.

“What? What’s wrong? Is there something on my face?”

Ms. Wang was startled by my scream, which was unusual coming from me. She must have played for a long time on the beach, because her caked-on makeup had been completely washed away, revealing her naked face.

‘Gaaah, dear Lord! Why did you send me this kind of trial!’

It was as if I was experiencing a terrible Freeze magic, which not only cooled my feelings a hundred-fold more effectively than singing the national anthem, but also froze them. The beautiful memories I had made while looking at Marisol, Ye-rin, and Ms. Lee Ji-hae were attacked and reformatted by a virus.

Her poorly proportioned body wasn’t even a 6 head-to-body ratio but a 5 head-to-body ratio.

[T/N: Head-to-body ratio is how long your body is compared to your head. The Korean ideal is a body that is 10 times longer than the head, which equals a small head and very long legs. So basically, Ms. Wang has

a big head and a squat body.]

I hadn't expected her to have long hair. However, she must have harvested some kelp from the beach, because a string of seaweed was stuck in her muddy, curly hair.

The horror of the naked face below was...

At least in school, it wasn't this bad. She had some mercy, because she went around with her face caked in makeup, which made it bearable to see. But, even if it was a slight exaggeration, the face that was revealed under the scorching Mediterranean sun made me want to take out my eyes and wash them in clean water.

'Where did her eyebrows go? And what is that field of blackheads supposed to be?'

I thought the story about the man who saw his wife after she came out of the shower during their honeymoon and yelled, 'WHERE IS MY WIFE' was just a legend, but...

That was how much of a shock Ms. Wang Sun-nyeo's face was to me—it was truly a face I hadn't ever imagined until now. It was enough to make my illusions about women immigrate all the way to Africa.

'Dear Lord, why do you grant me both joy and misery at the same time?!'

She hadn't even had a baby, but an ET level potbelly could be freely

seen above her swimsuit— at the sight of such a teacher putting on the air of an alluring(?) woman in front of me, I clenched my eyes shut. If I looked at her any longer, I would receive such mental damage that I wouldn't be able to go to school anymore.

"Hyuk, what's wrong? Are you hurt somewhere?"

'Graagh!'

After closing my eyes without responding, I felt a black evil stretching towards my forehead.

'I can't let that happen! The purity I've guarded up till now will be—!'

The warmth that was quickly approaching my face shocked me back to my senses.

"Ah! I-it sure is hot!"

RUUUN!

In the moment of crisis when my teacher's hand was about to meet my flesh, I whirled around right then and there, and flung myself into the swimming pool. All throughout, I was doing my best to erase the magic formula that made you shit blood, a spell that frequently popped into my head...

* * *

“Eh, ehh? What’s going on?”

After returning his disciple to his native country and losing someone to nag at everyday as a result, Archmage Aidal watched the idiot box broadcasts of various nations to kill time. For the first time in a while, he went down to the basement to check the magic circle and stammered his surprise.

“The mana is exploding, it’s exploding!”

Though he’d thought it would stay stable for a year at the very least, providing time for his outstanding disciple to get used to magic, the mana of the Dimensional Travel circle was rampaging. Because it was an enormous amount of mana that he had done his best to concentrate, produce, and gather for the sake of dimensional travel, if it exploded, not only the magic tower, but hundreds of kilometers of the surrounding area would certainly become a sea of flames.

“Hyuk, I’m sorry. Though you were supposed to have fun for a while... sobsob! Never forget the feelings of love this master of yours has for you.”

All of Hyuk’s card activity, as well as his everyday life, was thoroughly reported to the Mage Aidal. Aidal had been awed by his disciple’s remarkable adaptability— Hyuk happily took the gifts and used them as if they were his. In any case, the money Aidal had earned on the Earth was so deeply invested that even if Hyuk were to use hundreds of thousands a day, it still wouldn’t run dry.

Even so, Aidal was amazed by the sight of such a young guy spending

hundreds, thousands, and now millions, for the sake of bragging to his classmates.

If he had been curious about how his so-called master was faring, he could have asked the female staff member Aidal had dispatched from the group, but his disciple seemed to have completely erased his master from his mind.

And without knowing what kind of price tag was on the pleasures he was enjoying, his disciple was now savoring bliss.

“Lala~ lalala~ why am I so happy~ huhuhu.”

Every time he saw his disciple, who was living a life without regrets, a life Aidal had been unable to enjoy in his youth, Aidal’s stomach had burned. And every time the mana in the magic circle writhed, Aidal experienced the refreshing joy of a 100-year-old indigestion going away.

“Young life~ young life~ the young life of youth~ when you’re old you can’t have it~”

While humming a song he’d heard on a trip in Korea, many years ago, a song that had strangely reminded him of his regretful youth, Aidal hurriedly moved his hands. All while rejoicing at the future of his one and only disciple, one who didn’t understand his master’s kindness.

* * *

“You cannot go to Dhonakuhli Island. There is already a guest who

reserved that place... Ah!"

Raivan stopped breathing as a muzzle was pressed into his chest. He was the hydroplane pilot who escorted guests to the Maldives resort, Nikanilu Resort, on Dhonakulhi Island.

"If you don't want to hear the sound of a hole getting ripped into your heart, depart. Don't make me say it twice."

"U-understood."

Three people from the East had suddenly sought him out and abruptly demanded that he take them to Nikanilu Resort. The smell of blood that radiated from their bodies told Raivan that these weren't ordinary people. In particular, he could feel an unspeakably cold aura from one with the big, burn-like scars on his forehead.

* * *

"Hyuk, it's so beautiful!"

Wasn't there a saying that you should speak of the Mediterranean's sunset if you haven't seen it before? As if even the blue coral was sleeping, the emerald sea soaked up the magic dust of Time and was turned into red rubies under the sun's rays.

Surrounded by such a red sunset and the ocean view, I walked down the beach with an angel, enjoying Ye-rin's warm hand, which had casually grabbed mine tightly.

'Ye-rin, you're so beautiful, you steal my breath away.'

Having dashed into the swimming pool thanks to Ms. Wang Sun-nyeo, I dragged Ye-rin and Ms. Lee from their relaxation to have fun together. Using the water play as an excuse, my hands were able to freely appreciate the feel of Ye-rin's and Ms. Lee's silky skin.

And now, it was evening.

The kids who'd played in the water for several hours went to rest in their rooms, and Ye-rin agreed to my request to walk together on the beach with a smile, following me out.

"This is like a dream. It makes me think that the honeymoon I've wanted since I was a teenager must feel like this."

'H-honeymoon!'

As soon as I heard the word 'honeymoon,' my heart raced wildly, like a crazy runaway horse.

What did you think of when it came to honeymoons?

The first night, short yet long, together with the one you loved.

An evening spent at a beautiful resort.

Drinking wine as red as passionate blood, as you looked at each other with sweet gazes.

And then came the fated time.

Apparently people these days skipped all that and started the money talks instead, but how could you ruin the one and only honeymoon in your life with something so stupid?

"Hyuk... I'm more happy because... you're by my side."

'Ahh! Ye-rin!'

This is what it was like to be blurred by tears. Right now and right here, I was getting confessed to by a kind angel, who had beautiful looks that had nothing to fear in the world.

Now there was no one to be jealous of.

Gulp.

Our feet had stopped moving at some point.

Our feet half submerged in the water, with the shimmering sunset backdrop around us, Ye-rin and I stared into each other's eyes.

"Ye...rin."

"Y...yeah."

Even if I'd never been taught it, how could I not know.

I gathered her two hands, which had been holding mine, and slowly pulled them to my chest.

"I wanted to see you."

"...?"

With me suddenly saying I'd wanted to see her, Ye-rin's large, black pearl-like eyes blinked.

"Did you know? That you're a person I'd want to see even when I'm looking at her."

"..."

It was a slick combination of words that mixed cooking oil, butter, and even sesame oil, which even I could only be surprised by.

In that moment, the sun's light splashed onto Ye-rin's lips, slowly painting them apple red.

"Ye...rin."

I quietly called my angel's name, my breath gradually growing rough.

Our faces slowly drew closer, like magnetism. Or rather, It was as if I were the blood-craving Count Dracula, Ye-rin's red lips somehow attracted mine to hers.

'Mommy!'

The first kiss I'd only imagined for 17 years... True to the saying that the first kiss would cut deeply into your memory, this fateful time was something I'd remember with delight, even when lying in the grave.

Somehow, unbelievably, Ye-rin's eyes had closed, her eyelashes were trembling.

Her wordless consent.

My heart, which had gotten faster not long ago, was now beating wildly against my ribcage, as if it were pummeling it with a laundry bat.

'Just a little closer... a little closer!'

The rough breathing of a soldier who had to capture an enemy's mountain fortress came puffing out of my mouth. And then Ye-rin's full cherry lips were only a few centimeters away. Now it would be game over if I just clenched my eyes shut and pushed my lips onto hers.

'Th-this is...'

In that moment, while I was flushing with joy, I felt a shudder run through my entire body.

'Why in a moment like this!'

Suddenly plunged into a difficult situation, like having to choose between saving either your mom or your girlfriend, my body quivered violently.

The meal was all set, it would be over if I pressed forward by just a finger's width, but an enlightenment had happened to strike me now.

I hadn't even cast all the 3rd Circle magic yet, but the sudden surge of joy and expectation brought with it an enlightenment. From what I'd heard from Master, for Mages, overcoming the limit of the circle was exactly half as difficult as conquering Mt. Everest with your bare body, but it didn't seem like such a wall existed for me.

Something squirmed in my heart—it was the circle trying to elevate itself to a new limit.

But I had to make a decision.

There was no knowing when an enlightenment would come. I could plunge myself into the world of mana by following the enlightenment, or

unsparingly light this time on fire with Ye-rin.

‘Such mercilessness!!’

Because it wasn’t a short moment, Ye-rin was also feeling that something was wrong. The temperature I could feel from Ye-rin’s hand was running cold, and then—.

‘Argh, whatever!’

I made my decision and pressed my lips onto Ye-rin’s.

Chu!

Our lips met with a clear and bright sound.

“Y-Yerin, sorry.”

With a word of apology, I left Ye-rin, who was startled by the feeling on her lips, and without even looking back, I ran to a place with no one else around.

Thu-thu-thu-thu-thump! I ran without looking behind me.

‘Aaggh, the fate of a cursed Mage!’

I made my choice. Rather than the royal road that would have stretched

forth with Ye-rin, I chose the enlightenment as a Mage.

‘Waaah...’

Tears blurred my path.

But I did not stop.

Because no matter how untimely, a young mischievous imp had gifted me with the opportunity for enlightenment.

* * *

Ziiiiiiinnngg.

‘Geh!’

In order to not miss the enlightenment that had come, I entered a forest shrouded in darkness.

This was the moment I would rise to not the 3rd Circle, but the 4th Circle. By the Law of Mana Drainage, the moment the 4th Circle was formed, there would be a powerful outward surge.

I sat crosslegged in the quiet forest, and when I drew in mana by breathing through the channeling method Master had told me, the circle thrashed within my heart. It was such an intense feeling that it couldn’t

even be compared to when the 3rd Circle had formed. Moreover, the mana positioned in the upper and lower danjeons moved in conjunction, so the feeling of a new circle being formed drew closer with a heart-crushing shock.

‘Gaaah! I, I have to overcome it!’

I’d heard of people whose mana had scattered from the unfamiliar pain during circle formation, turning them into cripples. I clenched my teeth and circulated my mana according to the channeling method.

‘Ah!’

Then, all of a sudden, as if space itself was expanding, the circle in my heart rapidly enlarged. Like a snake shedding its skin and emerging into a bigger body, the 3rd Circle that I hadn’t even gotten totally used to yet extended into my entire body.

Ziing, ziiiiinnng.

But then, suddenly, instead of condensing back into my heart, it started forming a band in my waist area!

‘What the hell!’

If Master were here, I’d at least be able to ask him as much as I wanted, but I was shocked by this unseen, unheard of phenomenon.

'That's right. Master said I was the first to train using this mana channeling method, right?'

He had combined the internal chi channeling that he'd received from the ascetic monk with his own mana channeling method, creating a new mana channeling method. Even Master wouldn't know what was going on.

'I-is this gonna be okay?'

Ease and doubt settled after the pain. I was astonished by the feeling of four distinct circles encircling my waist area like the rings of Saturn instead of being near my heart.

'Have I really become a 4th Circle Mage?'

I was seriously doubtful. What if I died tragically in the middle of casting magic because of this circle, which just had to position itself weirdly?

'Then I'll lightly try 1st Circle magic first...'

This was a world in which even bridges could fall while you were driving over them. Feeling as if I were pounding a cement bridge, I thought of the 1st Circle magic that could be cast without an activation incantation.

"Light!"

Shwaa!

"OHH! Nice! This is exactly it!"

With my dainty incantation, Light magic as bright as a searchlight lit up the forest. I could feel less mana was being drained than when I cast it with the 3rd Circle, and the mana itself was stable.

"Then..."

While I was at it, I wanted to see for myself. My power as a 4th Circle Mage who'd been able to get a generous bonus on top of the norm.

"Fire Ball!"

I experienced the spectacle of the magic formula and will getting drawn out in my head, and the mana inside my circle combining with the mana of the earth.

Fwoooooosshhhh.

"OOOOOOHHHHHHHHH!!"

A red magic ball of flame the size of a bicycle wheel floated up in the space about five meters away from me. Even though I hadn't even invested all the mana I had, it was the biggest Fire Ball I had created so far.

'Huhu, now I'll have nothing to fear from not just boars, but even boar patriarchs! Uhahahahaha!'

As a Mage, this was exactly the kind of enjoyment you earned from an enlightenment. Although it was joy only I knew about right now, I was still happy. Going from a mere loser who'd known nothing just a few months ago, to a 4th Circle Mage, gave me a sense of accomplishment. It was such an immense pleasure that I wouldn't change a thing.

'... Has Ye-rin left yet?'

I suddenly thought of Ye-rin's red lips. After rising to the 4th Circle, my regret only grew.

'That's right, this isn't my only chance. Ye-rin might stay by my side forever, but a missed enlightenment won't come again!'

It was said that a man who didn't persevere didn't have the right to pee standing up. Even in my surging regret, I somehow found consolation.

'Then, next is... huhuhu!'

From 4th Circle magic onwards, you could use an assortment of attack and defense spells, as well as various kinds of magic for everyday use. Though I hadn't attempted them yet, Master must have done something funny to me. The 4th Circle magic formulas were fighting amongst each other in my mind, clamoring to be the first to be brought out into the world.

‘Sleeping magic, huhuhu, and even Binding magic on top of that. Huhuhu.’

Suddenly, magic-aided imaginations about unhealthy relationships flooded my mind.

‘No. Only bad guys think about such shameful methods.’ I shook my head as I dispelled those unmanly uses for magic. ‘But it’s weird. Why is it that when I think about a woman, an actual magic combo of Sleeping, Binding, and Silence comes to mind? Despite never having used those spells before?’

This unfamiliar magic combo, no, even these magic formulas I had never even imagined before, came one right after another whenever I thought about women. It was as if someone had seeded it into my memories.

‘I’m not that pervert Master Bumdalf!’

The face of my master, who’d lived two hundred years without being able to cast away his dream of rejuvenation, floated into my mind along with the work(?) spells.

‘Argh, I should sprinkle a fistful of salt, at least.’

I had forgiven master because of money, but even so, the mere thought of him sent a chill up my spine. It even gave me the delusion that even now, he was watching me somewhere.

‘When I get back, I’ll call a skilled shaman and have them perform an exorcism. I get goosebumps every time I think about him.’

Within that Gandalf-like good-natured face, Master Bumdalf was hiding his mega pervy, crazy, gangster nature. Just thinking about it gave me chills.

‘Huhu, it’s already night, huh?’

Dispelling my thoughts of Master, the landscape around me came into my view. At some point, the sun had disappeared and a full moon the size of a plump rice cake had drifted into the sky.

‘Marisol... is she really waiting for me?’

I suddenly thought of one scene I’d seen during the day. With a body blessed by God, where the curves went in at all the right places and out ever so generously, Marisol’s passionate gaze came to my mind.

‘Why am I so happy~! Young life~ young life~ the young life of youth~ when you’re old you’ll just be like Master~’

I involuntarily began humming.

‘Flight magic! That’s right, I’ll try flying once!’

The rule of studying was that reviewing was just as important as

preparation. Deciding to try casting the 4th Circle magic, Flight, I activated my circle.

Mana and will were the foundation of circle magic. The magic formula, which included math and the laws of physics, was also a necessary existence for a magic circle, and various kinds of experiments.

‘Lalalalala~’

The rules of magic manifestation had come to mind with a single thought. It was weird that the circle had formed around my waist area, but because I had confirmed there was nothing wrong, I was able to concentrate with a feeling of contentment.

‘Huh? W-what’s this?’

I activated my mana, and when I was just about to connect the activation incantation to fuse the earth’s mana with my mana...

I suddenly felt a strange energy from beyond the forest.

‘B-bloodthirst?’

I sensed an aura that was similar to what the boar had radiated when it was running to catch me. It was an aura that made a strange tension scintillate through me—it was as if needles were pricking my skin.

‘Two people, no, three? Why me?’

In the past, I would have just absently dismissed it, but the somehow ominous and viscous feeling made my body tense up.

I suddenly recalled Master's words that there would be many changes when I came to harbor mana.

'Hwang Sung-taek and his cronies? No, that's not it. This isn't an aura released by puppies.'

They hadn't been worth my fist even before I learned magic, so there was no way they could emit such a sharp energy.

I became more tense as I slowly calmed myself. When I had been learning Taekwondo, the person who had taught me, Instructor Jung, had been number one in the practical Taekwondo world in South Korea. Because I had studied rigorously under such a person, I didn't lose my mental composure even while tensed up.

'They're about 10 meters away. They're definitely coming.'

I didn't know how they'd known that I would be in a place like this, the people radiating bloodthirst were approaching me with certainty.

'I'll probably need magic.'

If I could feel their bloodthirst from this far away, then they definitely had some kind of amazing skill. It could get dangerous if I were to get

into a fight with such people.

‘Lightning would be good. So this is why he said that a Mage must keep their greatest attack and defense magic memorized.’

Master had often muttered advice to me, as if in passing. At the time, I thought it wasn’t that important, but thinking about it, it was all absolutely necessary counsel for a Mage.

Even as a 4th Circle genius who could conjure magic formulas with a single thought, I couldn’t compare to the experience of a Mage that had trained to death every day. It was like the difference between a child who had just learned to hold a spoon and an adult who’d used a spoon to eat, daily.

‘What a shame. With a little more time, I would have been able to memorize 4th Circle magic.’

I could cast 3rd Circle magic to some extent just by preparing myself mentally and imprinting the image in my mind, but I had only just risen to the 4th Circle. Also, because I had never cast 4th Circle magic before, I was even more regretful about the approaching danger.

And, with a rustle, they appeared.

They were three men wearing comfortable-looking black attire. As I had expected, they were definitely people who made a living by fighting.

“So you’re the crazy old man’s new disciple. Kukuku.”

'A Chinese man? Does he know me?'

A man with a hideous scar that looked as if he had bonded chewed gum to his forehead with superglue chattered with a Cantonese dialect.

"And who are you?" I skillfully responded with an authentic Mandarin accent.

"Hohh, so you can speak Chinese? As expected, you're worth being the old man's disciple. Kukuku."

'The old man's disciple? Does that mean he knows Master Bumdalf?'

Master Bumdalf had boasted that no one in the world knew about his existence. Having lived to two hundred years, there was definitely some dementia in him. After all, there was a Chinese gangster who didn't look so good precisely pinpointing me and calling me the old man's disciple.

'Well, this is shitty.'

Within the chink gangster's blazing eyes, I felt that there was a past that hadn't been resolved with that bad-tempered old man.

"Who's the old man?" I asked, pretending not to know.

"Kuku. So that old man Aidal didn't tell ya. That there's a senior who came before you."

"S-senior? Then...?"

If he knew Master's name, and could call himself my senior, then there was only one thing he could be.

'He's a Mage!'

Though it had endured the tension well, my heart thumped vigorously. This Chinese gangster was the first Mage I had met, besides Master. Considering that he looked like he had a nasty personality, he was Master Aidal's type.

'Ah jeez, life is just not helping me out here.'

Just a single glance told me these people were definitely born fighters, and had come looking for me with a grudge against Master. Moreover, one of them was a senior who knew magic. I was dying to call Master Bumdalf and chew him out.

"Senior, why did you come looking for me in a place like this? I would have met you halfway if you had at least called to let me know you were coming. Hahaha!" Hoping that maybe he wasn't hostile, I lightly threw out a joke.

"Go ahead and act cute, kiddo. If you disappoint me... I'll turn you into shark bait. Huhuhu."

But the returning response was as I expected.

‘He did seem like a dreary bowl of Chinese black bean noodles that doesn’t even have the pickled radish. This chink! Death is the default, and the other option is mummification! You rotten bastard!’

[T/N: Black bean noodles are a Chinese dish, very commonly eaten in Korea. It is always enjoyed with pickled radish.]

Resolved to kill me, the bastard’s murderous intent chilled all of a sudden and was carried on the night wind to me.

“Kill him.”

“As you wish!”

At his words to kill me, the two disciplined, rabid dogs stiffly bowed their heads.

‘Shit! Is, isn’t that a knife?’ All of a sudden, looking like it belonged in a sushi kitchen, a 50 cm long sashimi knife glinted savagely in the moonlight. ‘These bastards, that’s so damn unfair!’

The made-in-China gangsters were clenching their teeth and wearing faint smiles.

A sincere cry burst out from deep within my heart.

'There's nothing I hate more in the world than made-in-China products!'

* * *

'They were only together for a few months, but what's with this mana's energy?'

While entering the resort in search of the kid, Chang Li had suddenly felt a powerful mana's energy and had run into the forest. According to the info, the kid in front of his eyes, Kang Hyuk, had only been with that crazy Mage for exactly three months and ten days. But the mana the brat possessed was enough to make even Chang Li tense.

'He must have found a new method since then. Kuku. But what to do, your new disciple is gonna become fish food today.'

For over 20 years, Chang Li had been unable to forget. Even now, just thinking about when he had begged for his life by smashing his head into the ground until it gushed red, made his blood boil.

'A Mage isn't made in a single morning. Huhu.'

Chang Li's right and left hands were among the slaughterers of the Triad. While licking the finely honed blades with their tongues, the two men approached the kid. They went forward to slice a hole into the stomach of the Mage's new disciple.

* * *

"Keke."

"Huhuhu..."

Like former executioners, the two coyotes approached with knives in their hands.

Swiiissh!

They suddenly drew near while flicking their knives threateningly.

'This, this isn't a joke.'

Sliiiiice. They had honed the knives so finely that a simple flick of the pale blue blade seemed to cut the air. I would assume a defensive posture if I at least had a sword, but the only things I had right now were flower print shorts and a matching short-sleeved shirt.

'Bastards, I'll teach you just what kind of an existence a Mage is.'

But I possessed the secrets of magic, which were unknown to the world.

Shiiinng.

'Here it comes!'

It seemed that joint attacks were their speciality. With bloody smiles, the bastards ran at me like the wind.

‘Huhu, you blockheads.’

I had already mentally prepared the magic.

“Light!”

I forcefully cast the easy 1st Circle Light magic.

“Geh!”

Night had fallen. The moon was up, but at the powerful Light magic that was like the combination of hundreds of incandescent light bulbs, the two guys clenched their eyes shut, instinctively blocking the light with hands over their eyes.

Pow! Pa-bam!

I landed my Taekwondo specialties, the back kick and the roundhouse kick, consecutively on one guy’s chin and the other’s stomach.

“Ack!”

“Cough!”

Both of them taking a single blow each from the unexpected attack, they shouted as they crumpled just like that onto the floor.

‘M-mana even strengthens my legs! Niiiice!’

Even I was surprised. Each blow I unleashed after concentrating hit the mark perfectly— my legs were much faster than before. On top of that, I felt the blows hit squarely and heavily. I could vividly feel that the circle mana I’d activated in order to cast magic had migrated to the bottom of my feet.

‘Huhu, then if I hold a sword, will there be a sword aura or something?’

On the Kallian Continent where Master had lived, the knights there used Aura Blade. I felt that I would also be able to use it if I held a katana.

Clap clap clap!

“Haha, impressive. These guys are supposed to be at the forefront of the Triad, but you subdued them in just one move. And with something like 1st Circle magic at that. Hahaha!”

The one who called himself my senior clapped as he looked at the underlings who had collapsed onto the ground.

I couldn’t let my guard down.

‘There’s something about him.’

Even while knowing how scary magic was, this guy was not fearful.

"Looks like I'll get some exercise for the first time in a while."

Craaack. The guy tightly clenched his hands, which were in leather gloves.

'Mana? As expected!'

At the same time, I felt the energy of mana.

"I learned magic from the old man and rummaged through the continent for a long time. Huhu. In order to supplement the incomplete mana channeling method, I searched through ancient martial arts tomes like crazy. And I found it. Huhu, I found a divine technique that can rival the old man's mana channeling method."

'W-what? A divine technique?'

Though it sounded like a joke, it was definitely possible. Master Bumdalf had also gained the meditation method from an ascetic while traveling the continent, after all.

"I only know up to 3rd Circle magic, but I'm a 4th Circle Mage. Huhu. I realized that magic formulas and enlightenments were separate after overcoming the limit of the circle. Kuhahaha!"

'How could something like this happen! It's like getting drenched while walking down the road!'

I'd thought of myself as the sole user of mana in this world, besides Master Bumdalf. But an oddball had appeared. And he was a criminal who, at the very least, had sent a few people to the underworld.

"Act cute, won't you. If you want to keep your bones intact, at least. Kukuku."

Though he hadn't even raised a knife, I felt an even sharper energy from him than before.

'Wait up, is, is the Triad THAT Triad?'

The yakuza of Japan, the mafia of Italy, and the Triad of Eastern Asia, which included Hong Kong and Taiwan. The names of the world's three henchmen gangster groups came to my mind long after he'd mentioned one of them.

'Oh god, what the hell did that old man do!!'

Master Bumdalf had managed to make the Triad, not just South Korean mobsters that sold pots or whatever the hell they did, but the Triad that was internationally known as knife specialists, into his enemy.

"Please wait!"

I stretched out my hand to stop the man who was approaching as if he were slowly strangling my throat.

"..."

He stopped walking forward, but didn't say anything.

"I will give you the 4th Circle formulas."

"...!!"

At my mention of 4th Circle magic, a glimmer of surprise passed through his expression.

'Huhu. That's right, if you're a Mage too, then there's no reason for you to refuse this offer.'

"In fact, I can even tell you the rough location of where that crazy Mage is living on top of that!"

I wanted to see it once. An intense war between the Triad and an Archmage.

"Ku, kukukuku."

'He's laughing?'

But what I heard instead of a reply was simply the sound of the guy's laughter.

"You foolish brat, did you think that the likes of the Triad could kill that old man?"

'Eh?'

This guy belittled the Triad, even though they were so-called global gangsters. The shame and rage that surged from his eyes gave me the feeling that something I didn't expect would happen.

"That old man... fought Europe's mafia on his own."

'The mafia!'

I was hearing about Master's secretive past from the person who was apparently my senior.

"And he annihilated them. Though they armed themselves with anti-tank guns and even mobilized helicopters, the heavily-armed mafia was... he buried all 576 of them in the Alps Mountains. And so deeply that they could never be found again, at that."

"Damn..."

I didn't know whether I should cry or laugh. I was so stupefied, my jaw could only drop.

"I'm satisfied. You're definitely that old man's disciple, so I'll be completely satisfied once I rip the skin off your back. Kuhahahahaha!"

The bastard had made a terribly smart choice.

My legs shook. A true killer who knew magic was standing before me.

* * *

"Fire Arrow!"

"Water Shield!"

Ba-ba-ba-bam!

Shiiinng!

Even before I could come to my senses, the bastard attacked with Fire Arrow magic. I hastily cast Water Shield.

'Gah!'

But he hadn't been lying about having risen to the 4th Circle. In just one magic attack, the shield shattered like a window struck by a ball.

Swshh.

When the manifestation of mana exceeded its limit, the shield was naturally reduced to water droplets and dispelled.

And then came a kick.

Pooww!

"Agh!"

I crossed my arms to block his kick, but I cried out at the forceful impact while getting pushed back by several steps.

'I-it's strengthened by mana!'

It seemed he hadn't lied about gaining something called a divine technique. After blocking, the throbbing in my arms told me my bones could break with one wrong step.

"Slow!"

It wasn't just attack magic. He freely used 3rd Circle magic to try and catch me with mana.

"Mana Shield!"

Shwaaa!

A shield made of pure mana unfurled.

Fwssshhhh!

The magic created by his incantation crashed into the mana shield, making steam.

Shwick!

‘He’s a master of fighting!’

Though I had really fought for my fourth-degree black belt, this guy was on a different level. Sparring with my instructor and the other masters was as close to actual fighting as I had gotten. But this guy must’ve been trained in fighting techniques that knew no mercy, because his fist came raging in as soon as he saw an opening.

Paaam!

“Gack!”

Because it was urgent, I also struck out with my fist. But there must’ve been spin in his punch, because the sound of bone bouncing off rang out as the skin was torn off the hand that collided into his leather glove.

"You're pretty good, youngster. Huhu."

The bastard freely used magic and his fists. I didn't want to acknowledge him, but he was a more outstanding Mage than me.

'I could really die here.'

The story of my youth, which had just started to bloom. My life could end before it even started, with something like 'Main character was knifed and died.'

My mouth dried up and every cell in my body tensed as goosebumps rose sharply on my skin.

'To win against him... there's only the 4th Circle!'

The bastard was coming in and out like a cat that had caught a mouse and was batting at it. He didn't look tired at all.

'This little shit!'

Rage ran through my entire body. In South Korea, not once had I ever been in such a violent situation. Apparently there was violence in schools, but the strict school rules made that impossible at Daehan High School. And so far, there hadn't been many people who had picked a fight with me. This bastard was daring to play with me, Kang Hyuk.

I clenched my teeth.

'I will kill that bastard!'

We were both in the 4th Circle. But it seemed like he didn't know 4th Circle magic, and I did. Even if we were at the same circle, if the level of the magic was different, then the difference would be a hundredfold, no, even a thousandfold. If that wasn't the case, everyone would just train their 2nd Circle Fire Ball instead of aiming for the 8th Circle Hellfire magic.

"Let's finish this now, youngster. Since troublesome guys can appear."

This was a first-class, first-rate resort on a small island. The cacophonous sound of magic exploding out was more than enough to make the island shake, and guards armed with guns might swarm in.

"Alright, I want to end this too, you dirty gangster shit."

"Gangster? Puhahaha!"

At 'gangster,' the bastard broke into laughter while staring up at the sky.

'Lightning Wave!'

It was a critical moment, so I hastily activated my circle as I thought of Lightning Wave, which was at the top of the 4th Circle attack spells.

'O strength of Mana, unleash your sleeping rage upon this world! O

blue bolt of lightning! Your friend here earnestly desires your strength!’

It was a short moment, but I displayed immense concentration as I gathered the mana in my upper, middle, and lower danjeons.

And I was able to complete the magic’s activation incantation.

Zziiinnngg.

Perhaps I had concentrated too much, because every organ in my body, including my heart, was hurled into stabbing pain. It was an unfamiliar pain. It couldn’t even be compared to the time when Master had shoved me onto a magic circle and tortured me.

‘Am, am I overdoing it?’

If any Mage heard that I, someone who’d just risen to the 4th Circle, was casting the peak of the 4th Circle attack spells, they would call me a crazy bastard. It was as if I were running into the ocean right after learning how to swim, saying that I would cross the Genkai Sea.

[T/N: The Genkai Sea is a part of the sea between Korea and Japan.]

Ftzz, tzzz.

But even though I felt an abnormal response in my body, the magic was completed anyways. Now I just needed to cast it.

The bastard was wearing an unknowable, faint smile while watching me.

'He knows!'

I had the vague feeling that he had given me time to cast the magic.

"Lightning!" He must've memorized it thoroughly, because the bastard cast Lightning immediately, without even an exchange of mana.

Fwwtzzzzzzzzzzzz!

Though he didn't even have a mana staff, magic lightning coursed along his extended leather glove and burst out like blue streaks of electricity.

'DIE!'

The blue wave of electricity was blinding, and predicting that the bastard would approach in the heels of the magic, I stretched out my hand.

"Lightning Wave!"

The 4th Circle attack magic that was called a wave of lightning! As the incantation fell from my mouth, I saw my magic surge forward mightily like a rough wave toward the Lightning magic the bastard had unleashed.

'It's over!'

I had put my all into this 4th Circle magic. There was nowhere to run in a radius of 10 meters.

"Gaah!"

And as I expected, I heard the bastard's short cry from within the blinding light.

'Don't fuck with me, brat!'

Like when I had caught the boar, I grew dizzy and my body reeled, but the exhilaration was so great I felt like I could fly away.

Today was a historic day— I had won my first magic duel.

Then, suddenly, with a fleshy sound, I felt something flush hotly in my abdomen.

'H-how...?'

Even though the pale lightning magic was still spreading wildly around us and making sparkings as it went, the bastard's scorched black face had approached mine.

And the strange pain I felt in my abdomen...

The strength in my legs vanished and I sank to the ground.

And then, I saw it.

A pale blue knife was deeply embedded in my stomach. Leaving only the handle, it had penetrated my abdomen.

"Huhu, youngster. You've probably heard about it, about nano technology? Kukuku. There's no magic resistant mithril here, but in these modern times, there's a thing called science. Kuhahahahaha!"

'Na... nano technology...'

He was a vicious bastard. Without a doubt, he had definitely researched for years on end in order to kill Master.

'So, so I'm going like this.'

It was unfair.

A beautiful, flowery path to my dreams and paradise been perfectly prepared for me. I couldn't even give Ye-rin a proper kiss, and Marisol was probably waiting in my room right now.

'Ma... Master...'

After the initial wave of pain, my consciousness began to fade. With the extreme agony and the horror that I might die, my mind withdrew from my body.

"Farewell... you pitiful 4th Circle Mage. Kuhuhuhu..."

I heard the bastard's boorish laughter ring in my ears. I wanted to stand up and get revenge with this knife, but my body was heavy and sluggish.

And then, the faces of several people came to my mind...

Ye-rin and Joong Hyun, my parents, and lastly, the ever-cocky, notorious pervert, Master Bumdalf.

'Eat fuck!'

[T/N: The original meaning of 'fuck' here is a traditional Korean taffy snack. I have no idea why taffy became a synonym for a swear word.]

In my last moments, I forcefully shouted 'eat fuck' in my mind.

"Eh, EH! W-what's this?!"

The moment my eyes closed and my consciousness dimmed as if I were intoxicated on medicine, I heard the bastard's surprised voice. His voice was filled with shock, like the next door lady's had been last year when she was scammed out of her money.

'I'm sleepy...'

Everything became white, and something soft enveloped me.

That was my last memory.

While holding the earnest wish that a pretty angel had come out to meet me...

* * *

Flasshh!

"OOHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!! IT'S, IT'S GOINNNGGGGG!!"

As if a nuclear bomb was exploding, an intense storm of light flashed on the magic circle.

And, while looking at the magic circle, the Archmage Aidal shouted that it was going at the top of his lungs.

Shwinng!

"It's gone. It feels... truly empty."

With the disappearance of the magic circle mana he'd condensed for years and years, Aidal made a dazed expression. His homeland, Kallian Continent, which he had originally intended to return to. But because everything had become too much of a pain, he made a clone and sent him instead.

"Rascal, who knows if you learned magic properly or not."

Aidal saw his one and only disciple's cute face in his mind. The boy had taken the unlimited withdrawal card and rejoiced, partaking in joys that were reminiscent of a death row convict's last supper. Even Aidal didn't know why the sight of such a disciple kept flickering in his mind.

"Hah, surely he won't come out as Orc poop, right? At least in name, he's still a disciple of the Golden-Eyed Reaper Aidal..."

Shaking his head, Aidal erased the sight of his disciple becoming an Orc's meal with effort.

"Eh, I dunno if he arrived well or not. The coordinates were confusing so I approximated it. I've gotten old too. Hng hng."

Clasping his hands behind his back, Aidal lamented his age, without even knowing what had become of his disciple.

"Oh dear, I'm late! It's time for 'You're This Mister's Destiny!'"

He suddenly remembered a Korean show he enjoyed watching. Light on his feet, Aidal pressed the button of the magic tower's elevator.

"Young life~ young life~ the young life of youth~ when you're old you can't have it~"

Without a hitch, he started humming the song that was stuck in his head these days.

Strangely enough, he suddenly had a strong craving for something he had eaten a long time ago— it was called taffy.

How to Live in an Unfamiliar Place

"Ughh..."

'Where am I...'

I heard my groaning as my consciousness flickered back, piece by piece.

'Is this heaven or hell? Ahhh, I don't wanna open my eyes.'

Judging from all of my past actions, it was 0.1% more likely that this was hell than heaven, so I didn't want to check. The only filial piety I had practiced since being born was sending my parents on the ten thousand dollar cruise vacation. Besides that, there was that time when I ran away from kindergarten, the fight in elementary school, the porn incident in middle school, and in high school, the time I went and disappeared during the school field trip and became a missing person. There was really nothing I could say.

And that wasn't all, either. With the wicked thoughts I'd had towards countless women, and the "eat fuck" I'd shouted at my master in the very last moment, I would need 100 floggings and an endless 365 day course in hell.

'Why's this so soft? And the fragrant smell of grass is—?'

While I was sighing disconsolately because it seemed that female

demons would rush at me when I opened my eyes, various feelings from my senses swarmed in my head. It was a bit difficult to think that this was hell, where sulfurous flame burned all year long and dashed away any worry of getting cold.

'Maybe it's heaven?'

Even now, I could feel the hot knife on the skin of my stomach. I suddenly thought that this might not be hell, but heaven.

"He's still not awake, huh?"

"Shh, he's an injured person."

"As if! Hmph! He even drank a potion, the lifeblood of the villagers!"

"Deron, stop that. Dad told us, remember? That we have to be sympathetic to people more pitiful than us, in order to be embraced by the Neran, the Goddess of Mercy, when we die."

"Don't wanna! Rather than being happy after death, Deron wants to eat and play right now!"

'Wh-what is this sound?'

While my senses were coming back to me, I clearly heard words from an unfamiliar language. They were words I'd never heard before on the Earth, but as if I had an automatic translator in my head, it was

interpreted perfectly.

"Deron, did dad and I teach you to be like that? It's not just you, everyone is suffering! But how can... you..."

A girl with a clear and pure voice couldn't bear to continue and fell silent.

"B-big sis Cecile, I'm sorry. I just... wahh."

When the girl named Cecile fell silent, the boy that had seemed bad mannered cried as he apologized.

'The rascal, he's a bit rude but looks like he was educated well. Eh, wait. Were they talking about me, just now?'

I had been listening in confusion, but someone who had consumed something the villagers treasured, a potion, was being called more pitiful than themselves.

My eyes flashed open.

"GAH!"

And then I screamed.

"Ack!"

"Uwaaah!"

I wasn't the only one who screamed. The cries of the two people who were surprised by my shout rang out in an unfamiliar hut.

'Where the hell is this! Uwaaaah! Why am I lying in a place like this!'

It was neatly organized, but just one glance told me I was inside a house that reeked of poverty. I could see the entirety of a bare, wooden hut that wasn't even 350 sq. feet. There was a kitchen, if it could be called that, with a stove, a few big cauldrons, and a wooden table, and all kinds of animal leather hung on every wall.

On top of that, there was a girl who looked to be my age, and kid about ten years old.

Looking at each other as we cried out, our eyes were wide with shock.

"Uwaaah! He, he woke up! The pervert panties bro woke up!"

Ker-chunk! Without giving me a chance to say anything, the kid slammed open the door and left, screaming about 'pervert panties.'

"H-hi..."

Even during that, I collected my wits and waved my hand towards the blonde girl, who happened to be quite cute.

" .. "

But what I got in response was an expression of horror, as if she'd seen a ghost or something.

Ker-chunk! While she was open-mouthed in shock, the wooden door banged open.

"Aaghh!"

"M-my goodness, he really did wake up."

"Looks like the potion was indeed effective."

Several western women and men suddenly swarmed into the small room. Wearing rough clothes like I might've seen in a medieval ages movie, they looked at me and whispered amongst themselves.

"H-hello there?"

I didn't exactly know what was going on, but my life was definitely connected to this situation. I stood up and greeted them.

The blanket slipped down.

"AHH!"

"AH, OMO! OMO!"

'Agh!'

But amidst the screams of the women, I sank back down. Surprisingly enough, under the blanket, the only thing covering me was a single pair of underwear I'd never seen before, made out of a strange fabric.

'Where the hell am I?! Mother! Father!!!!'

I drew the blanket to my chin and earnestly called my parents.

Like that saying that you could only be a faithful son if you did your military duty, I had somehow become a faithful son in this unfamiliar place.

[T/N: Korean men are required to serve in the military for two years.]

* * *

"So you're saying... this is Luna Village, a town in the territory of Viscount Fiore of Dapis Kingdom...?" I asked once again with a voice that I didn't realize was trembling.

"Hmm, looks like the severe injury scattered your wits, young lad. I'll say it once more. I don't know where you're from, but Hans here found you collapsed on the beach and brought you here. This is Luna Village, in the

viscounty of Fiore, of the Kingdom of Dapis, in the South of the continent. And I'm the village chief, Aves. Sigh!"

" ... "

As if teaching a newly admitted elementary school student, Village Chief Aves slowly explained, word by word. The village chief who'd lost his front teeth took a deep breath, as if tired from explaining several times.

'O-oh my god! Why am I here! Uwaaah!' I held back from screaming, but I couldn't collect my wits in this absurd situation.

'WHY, WHAT, WHERE...'

Countless questions raged in my heart. I could remember everything up to getting stabbed by the Triad gangster, who claimed to have been Master's disciple. But I couldn't remember anything after that, and the words I was told, kingdom or viscounty or whatnot, were unfamiliar terms to me.

'M-master, you—!! ARGHH!!'

There was only one person who could be the recipient of my countless questions. The culprit responsible for making me an Alice of a strange country... could only be Aidal, a two hundred year old Mage.

'Fuck, then does that mean this bracelet was the key for dimensional travel?'

In this cold reality, once grains of rice were cooked into food, no amount of begging would return the food into grains of rice again. I could surmise that the silver bracelet on my left arm, which had followed me even into this puzzling situation, was an agent of Master's designs.

I finally figured out what 'a link that connects time to time and space to space' meant.

"Hans."

"Yes, Chief."

"Since it seems this lad hasn't yet recovered his wits, please take good care of him. It's already crazy because of the taxes, but... sigh!"

"I, I apologize, Chief. Because of me..."

The one called Hans was a hairy, robust man in his late forties. He scratched his head as he bowed extensively to the chief.

"No, no. Since when has our Luna Village become so cold-hearted and ungenerous... It's a shame that a potion was used up, but... it can't be helped. This is all within God's plan."

Talking about God's plan as if he were a saint, Village Chief Aves nodded.

"Let's go then."

"Huh?"

Saying that, Hans grabbed my shoulders and set me upright. According to the chief's words, this late-forties mister named Hans was the savior of my life.

"It's time for dinner, so we've gotta go eat food."

"F-food..."

Groowwl. With the mention of food, my stomach growled loudly as it informed me that it was alive.

'If you were going to send me, then you should have sent me well! Why the seashore! And I could have drowned! Arghhhh!'

I knew that Master was a person who always lived without restraint, but I really hadn't known that he was such an irresponsible person.

'I'll definitely return! My paradise! My homeland, South Korea! Gaaah!'

The cries I couldn't shout aloud!

Dragged along by Hans' thick arm, I was towed out of the village chief's house. And then, I clenched my teeth and made a vow.

I would definitely leave this ridiculous world and return to the Earth!

And I would definitely repay him for this day.

* * *

'T-this is food?'

The coarse wooden bowl that was put in front of me held a few potatoes floating around in a clear soup. And a single piece of black bread that smelled like barley landed on the table with a heavy thump. I couldn't tell whether it was bread or a lump of rock.

"Wow! Why're there so many potatoes today?"

'W-what's with this ridiculous, wretched smell of poverty?'

Once I realized that the cheer bursting out of the kid named Deron's lips wasn't a lie, I was dazedly submerged in shock. Just before I'd woken up, I had been eating luxury seafood dishes and a feast made by first-class chefs, but what suddenly appeared before me now was the smell of destitution.

"Eat up. Though it's not much..."

With a face so hairy it could put a bandit to shame, Hans made an apologetic expression.

"N-no, that's not true. Haha! These potatoes look sturdier than the ones I've always eaten at home, they're quite appetizing."

They were the saviors I was grateful towards for saving my life, the life that had been endangered by Master's irresponsibility. If I were to complain about the food, that would make me more dog than human.

'Let's give it a try.'

Because my stomach was clamoring, I pretended to be crazy and put a big spoonful of potato into my mouth.

"Ohh! It's good!"

'How can it taste like this!'

It only looked like a clear soup with a few potatoes floating around in it. But surprisingly, a peculiarly good taste filled my mouth.

"I-it's good?"

The blonde girl named Cecile asked me if it was good with expectant eyes.

"Haha, it's tastes just like the food my mother makes. It's truly tasty!"

'It's likely she's got the potential to become a first-class chef.'

I checked the inside of the bowl again, but truly, all I could see in the soup were the potatoes and a few slivers of vegetable.

"Hehe, so even the pervert bro has fallen in love with my big sis' cooking? Big sis Cecile is a chef acknowledged by everyone here in Luna Village."

The kiddo was eager to spout praises about his big sis.

'But why does he keep saying pervert, pervert?'

"Hans, why does Deron keep calling me a pervert? Did I make some kind of mistake before I woke up or something?"

"Ah, that... that's... well."

Hans stammered rather than answering my question straight out.

'Why did Cecile's face get so red?'

With Hans unable to answer, I looked towards Cecile in order to ask her and saw her flushing bright red while looking straight down.

"Woow! You're really shameless, bro! How can you ask so straightforwardly?"

‘What?’

Now, the only person who would answer me honestly was Deron.

“You don’t remember? Those panties you were wearing?”

“P-panties?”

He was talking about underwear, but the translator operating in my head interpreted that as panties.

‘The clothes I was wearing... geh! Surely not the flower print shorts?’

“Heh! How could a man wear such vulgar flower print panties even though he’s not a girl? When Daddy carried you in, you almost weren’t able to enter the village because of those bloodsoaked flower print panties! We were sure a perverted pirate was shipwrecked and got carried onto shore here!”

‘Bl-bloodsoaked flower print panties...’

My head rang dizzily. The short pants that were called shorts by everyone in the 21st century were mistaken as panties here. Actually, Cecile was wearing a long skirt even though the weather was quite hot.

‘I’m really... a pervert. Sigh!’

A kid's eyes were accurate. If Deron had judged me as a pervert, then the villagers might mistaken me for a pervert, too.

'But does that mean Cecile saw everything?'

There was a high chance that she had. Hans had carried me into this house. And the people who went around in this house were Hans, Cecile, and the kid, Deron. Moreover, the only clothing I was wearing now was underwear made of a rough material and a large piece of clothing that Hans had definitely worn before.

'Gaah!'

When my thoughts reached that point, a scream burst out within me.

"Ahem, the, the soup will get cold. Let's hurry and eat."

The atmosphere at the table had suddenly gotten awkward. Hans dipped his bread in the soup as he changed the subject to eating.

'But isn't this too much? This is next to the sea, so why can't I see even a single anchovy?'

There was a saying that people next to the sea would grow fat even in times of famine, but that a fish like that ever-so-common anchovy was nowhere to be seen on the table. As I chewed the hard barley bread, it made me think that Hans might be a penny pincher at the level of

Scrooge.

‘But do I have to sleep here tonight?’

Cecile was still silently eating with her head bowed. The sight of her perfectly tanned skin kept haunting my eyes.

* * *

Craaack.

“Urgh...”

‘Damn, I’m sore.’

I had only lived on plush mattresses made by Neis, a company that advertised that beds were a science. But last night, I had slept atop a single blanket on the floor by the bed where Cecile and Deron slept. And, after moaning all night long, I woke up in the morning and let out an invigorating shout as the bones all over my body popped back into position.

‘Why is everyone going out so early?’

The dim light visible through the open wooden window told me it was only daybreak, but before I woke up, Cecile and Hans carefully left the room. I knew they had tried to not wake me up, but my sensitive ears couldn’t help but hear them.

"Ma, mommy~ mommy!"

Just then, Deron, the lucky brat who'd slept in Cecile's embrace throughout the long night, began to call for his mom and woke me up entirely.

"Uwaaaah! Mommmmy!" cried the little kid sorrowfully.

'Tch...'

His mournful cries for his mommy suddenly reminded me of a memory from when I was young. When I was a child, from when my memories were still hazy, there was a time when I woke up to find that my mom wasn't by my side. Feeling as if the world was collapsing, I too had cried like this brat. And after crawling through the entire house, I was able to find my mom. Unable to bear the strain of child-watching any longer, my mom had been cowardly snoozing in my dad's embrace.

"Deron, wake up. It's your older brother, Kyre."

After finishing dinner last night, Hans finally asked for my name. But when I told him it was Kang Hyuk, Hans nodded and pronounced it as Kyre.

And my name became not Kang Hyuk, but Kyre.

"Older bro? Uwah! Bro! Find my mommy! Mommy! Hnng!"

When I took him into my arms, kid sorrowfully cried for his mom.

'But his mom isn't here.'

"Deron, where is your mom? I can find her only if I know where she is."

"R-really? Bro, you'll find my mommy?"

Besides being a tad rude, he was a cute, blonde kid.

"Of course! Even though I look like this, your bro is a very strong person!"

"Woow! Then, are you a Knight?"

"N-no, I'm not a Knight, but..."

"Then if you're not a Knight, a Mage?"

With curious eyes that seemed to be asking when I would go find his mom, Deron asked if I was a Mage.

"T-that's right. Your bro is a Mage. Just believe in your bro. I'll find your mom with magic."

'Rascal, you're pretty sharp.'

Having accurately figured out that I was a Mage, I looked at Deron proudly. I imagined he would soon look at me, a Mage, with a look of respect.

"Heh, as if. Did you think I'm a kid that would fall for a lie like that? It's fine, so let me go now, you smell like sweat."

But what came into my ear was a parade of words that I hadn't expected at all.

"Eh?"

I was dumbfounded by the sudden transformation in Deron's attitude.

"Ah, how refreshing. Hehe. What should I play with today?"

Deron left my arms and went straight for the door. The sight of a young, innocent lamb searching for his mommy just a moment ago was nowhere to be seen. The lamb had transformed into an impossibly wicked neighborhood menace.

'D-dammit! Arghhh!'

"Brother Kyre!"

Stopping as he was about to leave, the little menace Deron called me.

"What!"

"Thanks. Hehe."

Having turned my head instinctively towards his call, my eyes caught sight of the kid's smile. Wiping the tears that had dripped down his face with the back of his hand, Deron put on a happy front and ran outside.

* * *

"Haaah, this is nice!"

Coming out into the brisk air that felt like a September morning in Korea, I filled my lungs.

'This is totally picture perfect.'

It had been nearly evening last night and everything had been disorienting, so I hadn't caught sight of the village panorama. But now that it was morning, the scene before my eyes was exactly like the peaceful, pastoral landscape that I'd seen in paintings. Cotton clouds floated about in the sky and paddled towards the sea. The blue ocean waves I saw beyond the village felt to me as if they could ease and revitalize the air in even an ill man's lungs. The fairly large mountaintops positioned behind the village made me flush with great vigor.

‘Back to the mountain, front to the sea! It’s the perfect location.’

A hundred or so houses made of logs had been jammed into the village. Hans’ house was a little higher up than the others, so I could see the panorama of the village all in one look.

‘It’s exactly like a small fortress.’

With the sea and mountains, as well as fairly large fields, the village was surrounded in the natural protectors of wood, dirt, and rock. The village was approximately three meters above sea level, able to block most attacks.

‘Huh? But those people there, what are they doing?’

Like the proverb that the early bird gets the worm, the villagers were working hard on the fields that were just starting to brighten with light.

‘Why are the delicate women doing fieldwork instead of the strong men? Do they not have horses? People are plowing the fields.’

Having come from a 21st century civilization with cutting-edge machines, I saw a farming method I couldn’t understand. Though quite a few people lived in the village, I couldn’t see any livestock like cows or horses. There were only people to do the rough fieldwork, which a cow or horse should be doing, and the men were mostly guarding the area with bows on their backs and spears in their hands.

‘Right, I should earn my keep. I actually feel sorry.’

I wanted to repay the simple villagers who had treated me by using something called a potion. After all, to me, my life was as valuable as the sky itself.

‘Thankfully, there’s nothing wrong besides a small scar.’

Breathing deeply, I checked to make sure there was nothing wrong in my mana field. Besides my circle being relatively drained of mana, it was all good.

‘Like Master said, the amount of mana here can’t compare to that of the Earth.’

Even if you rose to the 4th Circle, not all 4th Circle Mages were the same. The size of the circle you possessed, the amount of stored mana, and your concentration power and willpower, as well as your harmonic force with the mana in nature and differences in mana channeling techniques— all these factors played a part in determining a Mage’s skill.

‘Better safe than sorry! There’s no knowing when I’ll run into another guy like that chink rogue!’

Thinking of the bitter lesson I had painfully learned with my body, I grit my teeth.

‘But why are they leaving the perfectly good sea and plowing the fields instead? It looks like a fishing village, but there isn’t even a single boat.’

The nearby sea had a gentle slope to it and appeared abundant with not only fish, but all kinds of by-products, like clams. But there wasn't even a single person hanging around the seashore.

'Well, maybe I should go lend a hand.'

When I was young, there was a time when I went to my grandpa's house and helped him with fieldwork a few times. Reviving that memory, I walked towards the fields where people were gathered to work.

* * *

"Good morning!"

Because I was an energetic fellow no matter when or where I was, I threw a greeting to the hard-working villagers with a loud voice.

"Kyre, so you woke up!"

"Omo, it's that black-haired young man."

"Do you think he's still wearing that underwear?"

Plowing instead of talking, Hans responded to my greeting, and the village women whispered and laughed upon seeing me.

'Sigh, if that's underwear, then I wonder what they would say if they saw

a thong.'

was truly curious about what they would say if they were to see the underwear popular in the 21st century.

"I see everyone is busy."

"Indeed. The tax collection day is drawing near, but we've had a terrible harvest."

"Alright! Stop playing and move it, folks! Luena's Moon will be in the sky in a few days, so we have to finish setting up the harvest before then!"

At someone's reply to my remark, Chief Aves urged everyone to hurry. He was standing on the field and overseeing the work.

'Luena's Moon? What does the moon have anything to do with the harvest?'

Besides the language and magic knowledge, nothing came to mind.

'Anyways, looks like Hans is having a hard time. The other men aren't even thinking of helping.'

The strict guard I noticed yesterday night caught my attention. I remembered seeing 10 or so armed village men with torches in their hands as we were heading to the chief's house in the setting sun. There were dozens of men. Most of the strong and useful men didn't even think

of helping the struggling women and were staring holes into the nearby forest. All the while, they maintained a taut tension, as if they were in war.

'Are there monsters or something?'

I'd never seen such things like monsters. I was curious about the mysterious monsters that appeared in fantasy novels or movies.

"Kyre, don't just stand there and help us, will you."

"Huh? Yessir, Chief!"

Because the others were busily harvesting potatoes, the chief was rebuking me as I blankly stood around.

"Hans, I'll give it a try."

His face and body covered in sweat, I called Hans' name and had him stop.

"Mm, you will? That'll be too much for you right now though..."

"I may look like this, but I'm quite strong. Please just leave it to me."

"Then I'll leave it to you for a bit."

"That's right, Dad. Please rest a little." Cecile, who had been holding

onto the plow that Hans was pulling, made a face of regret.

'The attentive ones are quite kind after all.'

Cecile was sixteen, a year younger than me. As was the specialty of Western women, she already not far from being a grown-up woman.

"Try holding it like this."

Hans, who looked like a brigand but was as kind as they came, made an apologetic expression as he fixed the plow to my shoulders.

'Guh! S-so heavy!'

The feeling of the fairly heavy plow, which I had wrongly underestimated, I felt admiration anew towards Hans.

'There's no helpin' it.'

If I just dragged the plow like this, rumors of my low stamina would fly and people here might even say that I wasn't a man. The villagers didn't have a very good first impression of me anyways because of the pervert panties incident.

As I took Hans' plow, the villagers stopped their work and stared at me with interested eyes.

'The spell for weight reduction was... this, right?'

I recalled the 3rd Circle weight reducing Lighten spell, quietly modified it, and chanted the incantation.

"Lighten."

"Hm? Did you say something?"

"No, sir. Haha! It's just that I was surprised because it was lighter than I thought!"

"It's light? Ohh, you're stronger than you look, huh?"

'Then I look...'

A height of 6'1" and a weight of 165 lbs was a fairly bulky physique, but it appeared that Hans saw me as no more than a weakling who couldn't even kill a chicken.

'Shall I try putting some mana in my legs, too?'

It kinda bothered me that the first magic I cast after coming to this world was for farming, but I couldn't just ignore the people who had saved my life. And because the potion I had consumed seemed to be very precious to these people, I'd have to repay them many times over in order to not feel guilty about it.

"Cecile!"

"Yes?"

Looking at me with a worried expression, Cecile answered me cautiously.

"Hold on tight! Hiya!"

Thanks to the fairly powerful Lighten magic, the human-powered plow was about as heavy as a pair of sneakers. Vigorously shouting 'hiya,' as if I'd become a horse or something, I ran.

Pa-ba-ba-ba-ba-ba-bat!

"Oh my!"

'Ahaha, so this is why Rudolph wants to run forever.'

Having becoming a horse for the first time in my life, I roughly upturned the field. And, while doing so, I felt the instinct to run. The feeling of the soft ground beneath my feet refreshed me.

Archmage: Volume 1 Chapter 9 - My Name is Kyre!

"Phew!"

"You're truly impressive!"

"Ohhh! We finished the work easily thanks to you, Kyre."

'Pant pant! The side effects of mana are... arggh!'

Greatly uplifted by the everyone's surprised faces, I had upturned the field like a crazy filly. And thus came the state of mana exhaustion. Characteristic of spells like Lighten, mana was constantly drained while the spell was being maintained. The result was that I exhausted my mana within one hour and only had enough strength to pick up chopsticks.

'I don't have enough mana. I have to expand my circle to the utmost and increase the mana.'

According to the Law of Mana Drainage, differences in the amount of mana in the circle were very subtle at first, but as soon as you became an upper circle Mage, the differences were like heaven and hell. I was able to fill my circle with mana far more easily than others thanks to the remarkable channeling method Master had taught me, but I couldn't fill the 4th Circle all the way yet.

"But Hans, why don't you cultivate the land over there? It's a pretty large area."

About a kilometer away from the village, fairly expansive plains stretched out unused. The slope was decent, and from the looks of the thickly growing grass, the plains definitely had good soil as well.

"Our harvest last year was small, so we can't cultivate it."

"Huh? What does the harvest have to do with cultivation?"

'What in the world is he saying?'

"Where are you from, lad? Are you not a person of this continent? Or did you come from an island where there aren't any monsters?"

"Ha, haha! I don't remember, so I don't know where I lived."

When something was hard to say, the best excuse was amnesia.

"I see. So that's why you say such things." Even as he spoke, Hans gazed at the expansive land with eyes of regret.

'I'm not some kind of fortune teller, so I'll only know if you say it.'

Having upturned the field with the plow, the women carefully stored the potatoes. Hans and I were able to rest a bit on the grass.

"There was a drought last year, so the crop harvest, including the

potatoes, weren't good. We couldn't catch fish, so we were depending on the field crops..."

'Why can't you catch fish? The sea looks perfectly fine.' I still couldn't understand Hans' words.

"Do you see the Zarre Mountains over there?"

"Yes."

A number of mountaintops were clustered side by side in the Zarre Mountain range. The range boasted an exceptional appearance that was reminiscent of a man's spirit.

"There are mountains there and mountains behind our village, as well. And... the monsters and demons that exist in the mountains can easily come to our village."

[T/N: Demons refer to demonic beasts.]

'Wait, so what do demons and monsters have to do with the harvest?'

Instead of explaining with ease and clarity, Hans sighed regretfully as he spoke. "Besides the taxes we must pay to the lord, we must also acquire potions from the temple."

"Potions?"

“That’s right. Blessed by the sacred God, potions aren’t just for healing wounds– it’s also precious holy water that greatly repels monsters, especially demons.”

‘Ohh, I see.’

“But usually, a potion only remains effective for a year. So every year, after paying our taxes, we acquire potions with the remaining money. For independent villages like us that don’t receive the lord’s protection, potions are even more necessary. If we don’t put a potion on the land we’re cultivating or on the boat we use to catch fish, there’s no knowing when a demon will appear and slaughter us.”

‘That’s ridiculous!’

Hans was saying that farming and catching fish were only possible if potions were acquired with the money left after paying taxes. If the harvest wasn’t good, like it had been last year, then there was less money for buying potions, and that could result in not being able to cultivate the land right in front of you.

“But aren’t there the villagers standing guard over there? Can’t they win against a demon?”

“Lad... so you’ve really lost your memory. How could you think that farmers like us can take on Demons, which can face knights using Aura Blade? The people over there are just for blocking monsters like Orcs.”

‘Aura Blade!’

No exact knowledge of demons came to my mind.

"Hans, but this is the Kallian Continent, right?"

"... Have you forgotten even that?"

Past being dumbfounded, the hairy Hans looked at me with an expression of pity.

'Argh. I've become a birdbrain.'

The one and only Kang Hyuk, the reckless kid who lived with pride, had been reduced to an ignorant amnesiac who only knew his own name.

"Then the potion I drank was..."

"Th-that was a potion we bought the year before last. The chief was holding onto it because it was a waste to throw it away..."

"Geh!"

'W-what the hell! Doesn't that mean I drank a potion that was past the expiration date! Uwaahh!'

"Thanks to you, a potion past its prime didn't go to waste. Thanks."

Hans, who had briefly turned me into a guinea pig for drug experiments, bowed his head.

'If... it hadn't been effective...'

It was a gruesome thought.

"Dad! Come eat lunch~!"

"Let's go. Our work this morning was quickly finished thanks to you, lad."

"Yes..."

"I'll leave the afternoon to you as well. Ahem."

"...."

Hans spoke as rose, dusting his hefty bottom.

While getting up, my body stiffened right then and there.

"Maybe it'll rain tomorrow..." Hans slowly walked towards Cecile and the villagers without looking at me.

'I'm not just a birdbrain, I've totally become a cow today.'

The potato field, which had become wider than before.

"Siiigh!"

I breathed out a long sigh.

I had consumed a potion past its expiration date, but I had to be thankful that I lived after drinking it. It couldn't be helped that I had consumed it, after all.

* * *

'I can't live like this! I want to eat meat!'

Completely labeled as the village livestock, I'd been forced to do plowing work for the past three days. Even so, it was fine. After all, I was using magic and repaying my life debt to the people.

But the problem was food. I didn't know how much the territory tax was, but I caught a glimpse of fear from the people— fear that they might not even be able to subsist with grain for meals, much less potatoes.

And so, I decided on an ambitious plan.

It was the grand 'I've gotta eat meat' plan. If things went wrong, I could die of malnutrition before I left this world.

‘So the thing is, in the past, before there was the big threat of monsters, they hunted and harvested greens in the forest and caught fish in the sea all year round.’

Since I’d worked hard to upturn the field for three days, the villagers were friendly to me, and I was able to hear a lot from them. In the past, this Luna Village was quite a well-off in the territory. At one point, it was a village that had a population of over a thousand people. But ten years ago, on Luena’s Moon, a day when monsters became more ferocious, monsters like Orcs and Ogres appeared and attacked the village.

Because they had always been prepared, the village watch was able to drive away the monsters, but they suffered a massacre from the demons that cunningly appeared like wolves after that. The demons had invaded because the ignorant Orcs had laid waste to the bottle holding the potion. Thus the village was brought to near destruction, and the survivors were now working hard to cling to life.

‘So they can’t hunt if they can’t buy potions, yeah? Huhuhu.’

They didn’t know, but I was a kind Mage who had come from another world. How could a Mage like me ignore the village’s crisis?

Flop flop!

‘Ah! Th-that is!’

I was on a seaside cliff, where I could see the village in one glance. I had

discovered it today, and it was quite a nice place. I could see the blue horizon extending endlessly, and upon seeing a huge object suddenly jump up above the horizon, my jaw dropped.

“TU-TUNA! Oh my god! It’s tuna!”

Very rarely, when my mother was in a good mood, I was able to taste tuna sashimi. Even then, it was a frozen tuna caught in the Pacific Ocean, but I still remembered the taste.

The tuna’s fatty belly meat, streaked with white stripes, called the supreme tuna belly.

That incredible, unforgettable taste of the meat slowly melting in your mouth.

The huge fish that was jumping up from afar by the horizon was definitely called a tuna. Somehow I’d unknowingly activated Magic Eye, allowing me to confirm it with my own eyes.

“One! Two! Ohhh! This is a sea of tuna!”

Tuna, the luxury fish whose more expensive individuals could reach prices of over 1 million in the neighbouring island nation known as Japan!

Starved for meat, the sight of the tuna drove me crazy.

“With one... all the villagers could throw a party.”

The feelings of the villagers, who couldn't go catch the tuna despite seeing them right before their eyes. Now I thought I could understand why the vitality in their eyes had disappeared. Not only did land monsters exist, but there were underwater monsters in the water, too. Because they were a number of fairly big ones, you could only catch fish if you had a few potions.

“GRAAAAAAAHH! You're all dead!”

I had never craved for meat this much in my life. No matter how cold-hearted my parents were in disciplining their offspring, they gave me meat at least once every three days.

“This is no time to be sitting around!”

The tuna, appearing like a mirage– I couldn't miss them!

“The freedom of mana shall soon be the freedom of the wind! Fly!”

Today, after finishing the potato harvest, the villagers had all gone out to the field to sow wheat. Atop the cliff, away from their eyes, I cast Flight magic.

Swoosh! My body floated into the air.

Flap flap!

Having become a bird, I flew towards the sea. In my hands was the small spear Hans had given me for 'self-protection.'

* * *

"Have you found him?"

"No! He's nowhere to be found in the village..."

"Hrgh, this lad, where did he go? Tomorrow, Luena's Moon will rise."

Thanks to the black-haired young man who had suddenly appeared in the village, Kyre, the villagers had been able to finish the potato harvest early and even sow the wheat. Though they had planned on returning home with their tired bodies and resting, when Hans cried out that Kyre had disappeared, everyone set about to comb the village. But the young man named Kyre was nowhere to be found.

"S-surely he didn't go into the forest, right?"

"Surely not. We seriously warned him that it was dangerous."

"He didn't run away, did he?"

"Whaddya mean, run away... it's not like he racked up a debt with us or anything..."

The two hundred or so villagers were gathered and whispering amongst themselves in the village square, where the chief's house was. The sun had dropped at some point and night was about to fall. It was too much for the village watch to go outside and look for him now.

"Kyre...."

When the villagers were talking amongst themselves, Cecile had her hands together and was praying to the Goddess of Mercy while thinking of Kyre. Kyre, a boy with uncommon black hair. It had been just a few days, but she had grown fond of Kyre– he made a smile that refreshed her heart whenever she looked at him. Especially because he had dripped sweat while dragging the plow in the place of her father, Kyre was a man to whom Cecile was grateful. She was so grateful to Kyre, who did the hard work instead of her father, whose strength had waned because there was little to eat these days.

'Dear God... please let nothing bad happen.'

Closing her eyes, Cecile prayed to Neran.

"H-he's here! Kyre has appeared!"

"He's walking from the beach!"

Just then, the name of Kyre came bursting out of the mouths of the several guards standing on the village palisade.

“The beach? Why from such a dangerous place!”

All the villagers swarmed towards the part of the palisade where the door to the beach was. Since the people of Luna Village thought of other people’s problems as their own, everyone was sincerely worried about Kyre.

Tmp tmp tmp!

Cecile’s eyes flashed open from praying ardently to god. And then, grabbing Deron’s hand (he’d been standing at her side) she ran towards the door facing the beach as the villagers swarmed to it.

* * *

“Hng, hng...!”

‘Argghh! So hard, tch.’

My hunger had driven me to fly recklessly above the ocean. Then, like the grandpa main character in ‘The Old Man and the Sea,’ I underwent a desperate struggle to catch tuna. So many tuna were swimming about that the ocean one kilometer away from the village was half water, half tuna.

But the problem was that the only weapon in my hands was a feeble spearhead lodged into a sturdy wooden shaft. Moreover, I wasn’t securely in a boat, but maintaining Flight magic to catch the leaping tuna– it was as hard as a blind man catching a pheasant with a stone.

I looked for chances and stabbed in vain hundreds of times, all while in midair. Whenever my mana fell, I retreated to the beach to catch my breath, then went flying off again to catch a tuna. I absolutely wanted to avoid eating a few potatoes floating about in a clear soup and the teeth-shattering barley bread. And then, I was finally able to stick my spear into the head of a blind tuna.

‘Why’d it have to be such a big one, jeez!’

The problems just kept on coming. The tuna that just happened to get caught by my lame stabbing was easily over 100 kilograms. I almost got dragged into the ocean by the speared fish. It must have been a fellow that had eaten a lot of natural, healthy food because it was as strong as a bull in heat, though that was a bit of an exaggeration. As soon as the fish got stabbed and dove into the water, I was forced to buckle down and raise my mana output to the max. If things went wrong, I could even become fish food while trying to catch the tuna.

Clenching my teeth, I invested all the 4th Circle mana I had, and fought desperately to keep the fish from submerging.

And so it went, for a long 30 minutes.

The moment I was about to run out of the once-plentiful 4th Circle mana, the fish went totally slack-jawed and lost its will to live. The sight of that made me cry manly tears because I had been about to let go of the spear and give up.

After the boar, it was the second hunt I’d won through magic. The

happiness of having become a Mage who could earn his own meal was indescribable.

‘Phew! I’m finally here.’

Dragging the fish with the spear, I reached the beach. I wasn’t able to meet the sea monsters everyone had told me about, and I proudly dragged my harvest towards the village. That is, after recovering my mana for a bit and applying Lighten magic, which I had trained to perfection these days, to the fish.

“Ma-Madir!”

“Ohhh! Goodness! How long it has been since I last saw a madir!”

“H-how did you catch a madir on your own...?”

‘Geh! W-why did they run towards me like this?’

Though I had cast Lighten magic, since I had spent half the day overdoing it with the Flight magic, my muscles were screaming ‘save me.’ I had shouldered the tuna with the one resolve to eat meat even in that pain, so I was late to realize that people had appeared around me.

“Wooow! The young lad Kyre caught a madir!”

“The chief! Hurry and call the chief!”

Everyone raised a ruckus. Bursting out with cheers upon seeing the tuna, the villagers didn't even think about helping me and went looking for the chief instead.

"Hahh, haaah! Hey, this is heavy, y'know!"

I couldn't even move because of all the people blocking my way.

Flop.

'Aish, whatever.'

Since it could just be washed if a little sand got on it, I gently laid the tuna onto the ground. But since it was a fairly heavy tuna, it sank deeply into the sand.

"Ohh! A madir was caught? A madir?!"

And, looking at the huge tuna and me, gap-toothed, old Chief Aves appeared amongst the villagers with such excitement that no one could butt in.

"It's really a madir! T-the first madir I've seen in ten years!"

Without even looking at me, Chief got so riled up at the sight of the tuna. He would definitely have a fit if he knew that in the 21st century, tuna like this were farmed from the ocean.

‘What a shame. If this was Korea, I could score a jackpot with a Japanese restaurant.’

Far over there, a school of tuna were still jumping up. If I were to catch that fresh tuna and sell it, the Japanese would go nuts and rush at me.

“L-lad, who are you, really?”

Recovering from the tuna, Chief Aves looked at me and asked who I was. It wasn’t just the chief. All the villagers that had rushed over had the same question in their eyes.

“Kyre. Haha! My name is Kyre!”

Scratching my head, I gave a refreshing smile.

‘I’m Kyre, a Mage from the 21st century. That’s who I am. Uhahahaha!’

While holding back and hiding the truth I couldn’t reveal within my heart...

* * *

“Kyaa, this is killer!”

I was eating the tuna stew cooked by Cecile, whose cooking skill was ridiculously perfect and deceptive in appearance. With just one tuna, I

had received immense gratitude from the villagers. The meat was divided into about a hundred parts so each family could have some to eat, and with a chunk of meat just larger than a fist, the villagers wept as they relayed their feelings of thanks. Apparently, it was precious meat that was hard to catch even ten years ago, so they couldn't just have a taste of it. And just like that, the tuna I caught gave a small comfort to the villagers who had been losing hope.

"Bro! It's really tasty! Before, I only admired Dad but now I wanna admire you too!"

The tuna head that was left over after deboning the meat was my share, and with that plump, fleshy head, Cecile made a very tasty fish stew. And for the silly little kid, a few pieces of meat made me his hero.

'So your pops gets more admiration than a Mage, eh. Rascal.'

With the tuna broth bringing joy to my mouth, I contentedly let Deron's immature remark pass.

"Sigh, it sure was tasty, but if we had sold the madir, it would have helped towards the tax..."

'Seriously, how much is this tax? All the villagers are bemoaning the tax.'

"Hans, how much is the tax? Why is everyone so busy worrying about the tax?"

"Sorry. To make even an outsider like you worry about the villagers..."

Hans scratched his head.

"I'm hurt, Hans. I, at least, have never thought of the villagers, including you, Cecile, and Deron, as strangers..."

Though it hadn't been many days since coming to this new world, I had been touched by the generosity of these simple people, something you couldn't easily experience in the 21st century. To save a stranger like me, they had given me the food they had little of and even a place to sleep. It made me sad that Hans thought of me as a stranger.

"N-no, that's not what I mean, I just don't want to burden even you with the troubles of village. You're young and overflowing with dreams, after all."

'Haaah, you drive me crazy. Just hurry and tell me how much it is.'

I understood how Hans felt, but if you received a sincere act of kindness, repaying it many times over was best. Free was free, and a debt was a debt.

"In the kingdom currency, it's 50 gold. The tax assigned to our village," said Cecile quietly, in the place of her father.

"50 gold?"

'Wait, gold sounds like golden coins, but how much is that?'

I didn't have any clear reference points for this place's currency, so I looked blankly at Cecile with my eyes wide open.

"A healthy horse is 5 gold. But as you've seen, the things produced from our village are only potatoes, wheat, and leather from the few animals we can catch once in a Lashiar's moon. We would have made a few gold from the madir we ate today, but..."

[T/N: I'm guessing Lashiar is a deity of fortune, so it's like 'once in a blue moon,' Kallian continent style.]

Hans was sorrowfully grieving for the tuna even after eating his fill. It wasn't as if he didn't know a tuna wouldn't come back once eaten, but he was stirring the tuna meat in his bowl with his spoon while looking at it regretfully.

'Ah, I wish I had the unlimited withdrawal card.'

The absolutely powerful platinum card, which had made me love Master Bumdalf in the blink of an eye. I seriously needed it in this moment. I wanted to withdraw a few million or so at an ATM somewhere.

"Hans, how much would a demon cost?"

"D-demon? Hrm, why are you suddenly asking about demons?" Hans' mouth dropped at the mention of a demon as he asked.

"From what I heard, since it takes a Knight capable of using Aura Blade to hunt one, it must cost quite a lot, right?"

"Of course, the leather of a demonic beast demands a high price, but... stop dreaming. I don't know how you were so fortunate to catch a madir, but a demon is a creature of a totally different caliber. The demons evolved from the demonic creatures summoned long ago, in the time of the Divine War. I heard it even takes few Knights to be able to face one."

'Demands a high price? Huhu. Alright, that's exactly it.'

I paid no heed to Hans' other words.

"Hans, but why doesn't the lord subjugate the demons? The village even pays taxes, so shouldn't he at least deploy some soldiers?"

"Bro, you're an idiot, right?"

Deron looked up from picking the bones clean of tuna and stared at me with a look of pity.

"What, what?"

"If it were you, would you send knights and soldiers to a worthless village like this when they could even be killed?"

'Ack...'

I had known that kids were scary, but Deron was on a level of his own. The kid was clever enough to swindle the naive villagers.

"Deron is right. Ten years ago, our village even paid a tax of a thousand gold. Back then, monster hunting mercenaries occasionally took up residence here, and since many merchants came through, dozens of soldiers were dispatched. But... they all died from the attack of the demons, and with the village ruined, the lord lost interest in us. There are probably a hundred places to help besides us in the territory."

"But, then why do you pay the taxes? If you have that money, you can live in comfort."

"We can do that if we want to die for treason."

"T-treason?"

'Isn't this totally mobster style?'

I'd heard that in the Middle Ages, lords played king in their land, but I hadn't known that such a thing was happening even in a place like this.

"By any chance, is there anyone who has ever hunted a demon in the village?"

"A demon... there's just one person. He was the village's top warrior in his youth."

"Who is that?"

"You know him too. That person is... the chief."

"Whaaat! Th-the chief?"

Chief Aves, who spoke while babbling like a newborn baby, and had lost most of his teeth. It wouldn't be strange even if he were to die today or tomorrow, so I couldn't believe that he had once been the village's top warrior.

"Let's go to sleep now. Luena's Moon is rising from tomorrow onwards, so we have to mend the palisade. Cecile, thanks for the meal."

"It was nothing, there's no need to thank me. We had a good meal for the first time in a long while thanks to you, Kyre."

"I-it was nothing. I didn't do much."

Cecile was a year younger than me, but for some reason I couldn't relax my speech around her. To me, Cecile was such a charming woman that even if she were to go to a nightclub, she wouldn't be subjected to a serious check.

'Huhu, it's a relief. That I'm in Hans' house and not the chief's.'

There was a saying that you could only experience the true taste of alcohol if it was poured by a woman, even if she was a granny. I liked Hans' house, which was filled with the fragrant aroma of a woman. Even if I had to sleep on the hard, bare ground, which made my whole body ache when I woke up in the morning.

* * *

"Huuu!"

Breathing in deeply, I finished mana channeling. I was on the cliff I'd discovered a few days ago, where I could clearly see the village and the sea. Hidden from prying eyes, it was just the thing for training.

'I haven't maximized the circle yet. Seriously, what a huge amount of mana.'

The difference between 3rd Circle mana quantity and the 4th Circle was like the difference between a condo and an apartment building. Though the environment of the Kallian Continent was flush with considerably high-density mana, I still couldn't fully fill the huge circle wrapped around my waist area.

'I'll have to fill it up for another fifteen days, at the very least.'

After rising to the 3rd Circle, I'd been able to fully charge the circle with mana in just three days, but the 4th Circle was on a different level.

'The problem isn't the mana quantity, but the skillful use of magic. It's too dangerous to act cool and play wizard like other Mages do.'

Though I'd grown past being the Orc poo that Master had intimidated me with, and was now at the level of Ogre poo, I felt that the 4th Circle

wasn't enough. Just catching a single tuna a few days ago had been a handful. So it was still too much to fight against monsters, demons, and Knights using Aura Blade.

'I've gotta get stronger.'

Clenching my teeth tightly, I realized that I had to live as if I were in a Marine Corps boot camp training ground. Even if you were powerless like the people of Luna Village, no one in the continent would protect you. In Korea, the military men and the cops were around to ensure safety, but not here.

'I have to skillfully graft together magic and actual martial arts, like that guy.'

The chink gangster who'd left a blade sitting pretty in my belly. I recalled the movements he had attacked me with.

'Thankfully, I've learned how to use a sword. And with the mana breathing technique Master taught me, I can learn magic, the sword, and even summoning. Now, all that's left is my efforts.'

I had sought out the chief and asked him several things about demons. Things about the kinds of demons, their characteristics, and even how to handle demon leather. Since the villagers tried not to leave their houses for a month as Luena's Moon rose, even during the day, the chief spluttered on and on about his 99% false tales of heroism and demons for a long half day. All throughout, he was wearing an expression of, 'I've got you now.'

It was the appearance of a new hero, one who could rival Ms. Wang Sun-nyeo, the Dreaded Snow White. He'd also lost his teeth and was speaking with an accent that was hard to understand. While concentrating and listening to him, I reached a level of exhaustion that was on par with the time when Master had trapped and tortured me on the magic circle.

'Most demons have a certain degree of tolerance to magic, and even Knights using Aura Blade have to be Blade Knights at least to be able to catch them. They're strong. And I'm still weak.'

I coldly accepted the reality. I was the disciple of an 8th Circle Archmage, but I wasn't an Archmage myself.

Chiing!

'A sword...'

At the end of half a day of mental assault, Chief gave me the sword he'd used in his youth, saying that I had allowed him to taste madir again before he died. It was called a long sword. I kept recalling the phrase, 'weight of a sword', something my instructor had told me after earning my Kumdo 2nd dan.

'The sword becomes one with the mind.'

Unlike the other styles of Kumdo, which were universally known, the Swift Style Kumdo I had learned was the pure, characteristic style of my people, descended from the Goguryeo period. And the Swift Style Kumdo

taught disciples that the sword was the mind.

"Strength!"

Shing! After unsheathing the sword, I forcefully cut downwards.

"Weight!"

Shiiiiing! I slowly raised the sword again, maintaining its brimming power.

"Speed!"

Baam! After raising the sword, I swung it sideways with all the strength I could muster.

'These three conditions are the first and last techniques of the sword. Even for flashy moves, if those three conditions aren't met, they're merely trickery of the eye. I'll make all of these conditions mine!'

I had quit Taekwondo and the sword in 7th grade to immerse myself in studying, to get into Daehan High School. And now, in this unfamiliar place called the Kallian Continent, I had to pick up the sword again to survive. Until the day I returned, surviving was my absolute, greatest priority.

'You tuna, you're all dead!'

Unaware of my resolution, the tuna were leaping above the sea, mocking me. The day I learned how to double cast 4th Circle magic would surely be a funeral day for the tunas.

‘Demons, just you wait. Huhu.’

I turned my head to gaze at the splendid sight of the Zarre Mountains, which ran opposite to the sea. Until the day I returned, I had to eat and live. But I couldn’t live in poverty while eating potatoes. I needed amazing merchandise in order to live a hearty, long, and glorious life.

“Uhahahahaha!”

My heart was filled with the mana of the Kallian Continent. I was Kang Hyuk, a man who’d received extreme special training since birth, training to be able to survive no matter where he was!

There was nothing to fear just because it was a different world.

The most childish daredevil in the entire world! The only human under the sky who possessed such childish recklessness, and an Archmage’s disciple from a 21st century world, at that.

That man was none other than me, Kang Hyuk– no, Kyre.